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Arvid G.W. Gullerud Obituary

O LORD, You have searched me and known me . . . You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well . . . How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them (Psalm 139:1, 13-14, 17).

Arvid Gerhard Walter Gullerud, began his earthly journey on January 19, 1920, when he was born a gift of God to the Rev. Olaf and Sarah (Tyssen) Gullerud about a mile from the small village of Glendorado, Minnesota. He was born in a snowstorm at home and delivered by a midwife.

As an infant he received the washing of regeneration in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism by his father at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Princeton MN. When the family relocated to rural St. Peter MN, where his father served Norseland Lutheran Church, he began his elementary education in the Nicollet Christian Day School at Norseland. Jesus also continued to be his loving Teacher. He provided him instruction in the Way and preserved him in the Truth that sets us free. As a young teenager in 1934, Arvid made public profession of his Christian faith in the Triune God and was confirmed by his father at Norseland Lutheran Church in rural St. Peter MN. Shortly after his confirmation and his father's death, he moved to Brookings SD, with his sisters and mother, where they rented a house. When he began his high school education, he boarded at the schools, going home for vacations wherever his mother and sisters were living. He first attended Dr. Martin Luther High School in New Ulm MN. During his high school days in New Ulm, he worked on a farm with cows, turkeys, and chickens and also worked in the alfalfa fields with the threshing crew. He enjoyed driving horses so much, that at that time he thought he would become a farmer. He also played on the baseball team. However, the Lord had other plans for him. Following four years of college education, he graduated from Northwestern College, Watertown WI, where during that time, summer jobs found him working in a canning factory at Sussex, WI and also in a brewery, which at that time was frowned upon. He also was one of two male cheerleaders for the basketball team. After an additional three years at the Lutheran theological seminary at Thiensville WI, he graduated with a divinity degree.

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life . . . And willingly works with her hands. (Proverbs 31:10-12, 13b).

Pastor Gullerud was ordained into the holy ministry on July 6, 1947, at which time he was also called and installed as pastor of the dual parish, East and West Paint Creek Lutheran Congregations (of the Norwegian Synod) at Waterville IA. He began his pastorate there as a bachelor where he also raised sheep on 15 acres of pastureland which was part of the congregation's compensation for his pastoral service. During that time, he was joined together in holy marriage with Eleanore Odegard, whom he knew from childhood and became very fond of. They were married at Fairview Lutheran Church, Minneapolis MN, on September 15th, 1948. Their marriage would span 67 years and the Lord would bless this union with five daughters and one son.

Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:3-4).

In the fall of 1951, he accepted the call to serve Pinehurst Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, WI. He sold his sheep to finance the move. In 1958, in faithfulness to the Word of God, he and members of his congregation left the fellowship of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) for confessional reasons. During this time, he came together for mutual study, edification, and fellowship with other pastors who had left their respective fellowships to form the Interim Conference, which eventually organized and by God's grace became the Church of the Lutheran Confession, of which he became a charter member, together with his newly organized congregation in Eau Claire WI, Messiah Lutheran Church. During his pastorate there, he helped start a Christian day school, and a new church and school building were built.

While in Eau Claire, Pastor Gullerud was also instrumental in finding the Ingram Estate, a 75-acre lumber baron's estate in south Eau Claire, (I referred to him as the "pioneer" who first set foot on the soil of the Ingram Estate.) which the new CLC church body purchased and, by the blessing of our Lord, developed into the beautiful campus of Immanuel Lutheran High School, College and Seminary which we have today. During those early years of this new church body, he also served as Secretary of the ILC Board of Regents from 1963-1967. His ministry in Eau Claire spanned 18 years, after which he was called by the CLC Board of Missions to start a new church in the North Houston TX, area, later called Bethel Lutheran. During this time, he also served a group of Christians twice a month in Corpus Christi TX. This church is also now an established CLC mission congregation: Resurrection Lutheran Church. From Texas, he followed the Lord's call to Servant of Christ Lutheran Church in the Los Angeles CA, area. Twice a month he made the circuit from L.A. to El Cajon, then to San Diego and back to L.A.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

During his life the Lord Jesus continued to lead and guide Arvid as a faithful shepherd and humble servant of the Word, proclaiming the Savior's love and forgiveness, sin and grace to all who would hear. And the Lord still wasn't done with Arvid.

While in semi-retirement he also served various mission congregations in Portland OR, Ketchikan AK, Jacksonville FL, and Dallas TX. He also faithfully served as vacancy pastor and, for many years, assistant pastor here at Gethsemane. Personally, for me he wasn't just an assistant pastor, he was my mentor and one of my closest friends. In retirement, while he was still able, he enjoyed camping at Lake Diamond, woodworking in his shop, golfing, fishing, serving as a delegate to the CLC

Convention, keeping apprised of the work going on in the CLC, as well as following his favorite sports teams and reading.

During the past few years of declining health, Arvid continued to live each day to the glory of God, praising Him for His many blessings, as he basked in the sunshine of His Savior's grace. For as long as the Lord gave him strength, he looked forward to worship here every Sunday as he would drive his chair right up here in the front of the church. He also enjoyed being with our Gethsemane Seniors and at the church fellowship potlucks. And he always had an interesting story to tell. He finally made his home with Eleanore at Good Samaritan Village, always content and appreciative of the special care and respect he was given. As the months went by, it became evident by his increasing weakness that the Lord intended to deliver him from this temporal life unto Himself in heaven. And Arvid knew well from the gospel that Jesus assured him of this and prayerfully and peacefully awaited that day of deliverance.

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

The Savior kept His promise. Arvid, who placed his confidence in the guiding hands of his Savior throughout his life, was peacefully led by his Lord into the realms of eternal glory early Friday morning, December 18th, having attained the age of 95 years, 10 months & 29 days. And now Jesus says to each of us, as He said to your loved one: **"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." John 14:1.**

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."

Funeral Sermon Delivered at the Victory Service for

Arvid G. W. Gullerud

March 18, 2016 – Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Spokane Valley WA

Pastor Robert List, Speaker

For your comfort, the Word of God that I would lay upon your hearts is taken from Rev. 22:20b:

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

In Christ our risen Savior, the Conqueror of death -- the Giver of life, dear fellow members of Gethsemane, friends, and relatives, but especially you ELEANORE, JOAN, RACHEL and HEIDI,

We are gathered here this morning for a memorial service. But not just a memorial service. It is a memorial service for a Christian, a precious child of God, Arvid Gullerud, who already lives eternally in the mansions of heaven. That fact lifts this memorial service above the level of an ordinary memorial service, for at the funeral of a child of God, we can turn to God's Word and find the healing and comfort it offers for the hearts of those that are His at a time like this. And so, for your comfort this this morning I would invite you to again listen to the words of our text:

"EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS!"

First of all, this prayer of a Christian “COME, LORD!” is a prayer for deliverance from this world. Many times Arvid prayed the words of the Lord's Prayer with the young, with the sick, with the aged and dying, as well as with his fellow believers here in the house of God. He prayed in that prayer: DELIVER US FROM EVIL! Those words, too, are a prayer for Christ to come and take us from this world. Oh, the unbeliever can't understand those words, for many find passing satisfaction in the things of this life, the pleasures and possessions it has to offer. He knows that he will not always have them, but should enjoy them while he can. So, he can't understand the Christian's prayer: COME, LORD JESUS!

Why does the Christian pray that way? Why did your beloved husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, fervently pray those words many times in his life? Because he knew that the world is not perfect. He knew the world was sinful. Although the world was created perfect, mankind brought sin upon the world and changed it all. And we see sin all around us. We see the corruption that is in the world. We see all the activity of Satan, striving to overthrow the works of God. We see the activities of Satan in the hearts of people, leading them into sin and unbelief. He truly is a roaring lion, seeking to destroy the souls of mankind. And Christians, too, experience sickness and suffering, the infirmities of life in their own lives, which are the effects of sin.

That's why Christians pray: COME, LORD JESUS! or as in the Lord's Prayer: DELIVER US FROM EVIL! It is a prayer, above all, that God would deliver us from this evil world for all time. That your loved one knew. He knew he had no abiding city in this world and that someday he would stand in the presence of God. From the time of his baptism, and throughout the years as he faithfully proclaimed God's holy Word, and as he sat at Jesus' feet here in the Lord's house and nourished his faith upon that Word, and as he eagerly came as a guest to the Lord's Table, he came with the deep faith in his heart, assured to him by Scripture, that a better place had been prepared for him by his Savior, for Jesus says: “I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU!” That's why Arvid Gullerud, with faith in his Savior could look ahead with confidence to that eternal day, assured of being welcomed into the glory of heaven.

These words we have prayed--“THY KINGDOM COME”--and “DELIVER US FROM EVIL,” have now come true for your dear and gracious loved one, our Christian friend, Arvid Gullerud.

The opening words of our brief text today, “EVEN SO,” are another translation of the familiar conclusion to our prayers, AMEN, “let it be so!” The words express the certainty of Christian faith. What is that Christian faith? We know that it is wonderful in the blessings and comfort that it brings. Christ says, “HE WHO BELIEVES ON THE SON HAS EVERLASTING LIFE.” Christian faith is not simply believing that there is a God and that someday, some way everything will work out all right. It is much more. GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE. That is Christian faith -- trusting in Jesus Christ, the Son of God as Savior. And by that faith your loved one and all believers receive the perfect righteousness of Christ, for on the cross Christ died to pay for all our sins. That faith rests not in what we cannot do. For we cannot earn one part of eternal salvation, but faith rests in Christ alone, and that your loved one knew and cherished in his heart. How he looked forward to our regular devotion time together in the Word and so did I, because each time we shared those precious moments in God's Word, he would in effect finish the devotion and I would come away uplifted. And He is the first person and dear friend of mine who has ever called me on the phone and said matter-of-factly: “I just want to tell you I'm dying.” And when I got off the phone and hurried over to see him at Good Samaritan and entered his room, he said, “You didn't have to come right away, I think it will be a few days.” He confidently accepted it as another day in his life and he knew, as a child of God, he would go on living eternally. That's because of his faith in His Lord and Savior. He knew that in this life he couldn't live without the Lord and certainly couldn't die without Him!

Many were the times when your loved one led us in worship here, bringing the Word of reconciliation to precious souls, many were the times when he sang with us in church, expressing His faith in the risen Lord, looking forward to that time when he would be with Him in the home Jesus has won for all believers in Him! He has gone ahead to that home that has beckoned to him throughout the years of his life, for he is one who knew full well the meaning of the hymn verse:

There are the good and blest,
Those I love most and best;
And there I, too, shall rest,
Heaven is my home! (TLH 660:3)

Jesus was his anchor in life and his anchor now in death. All the promises of God are now a reality for him. That is the comfort in the midst of your loss that you can take with you today. All you who mourn for a beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, pastor, and friend remember this. Our fellow believer in Christ, Arvid Gullerud, has reached the goal of every Christian. May we then in faith continue to pray as he prayed: EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS! as we look toward the glory of heaven.

Certainly God's grace was sufficient for Arvid Gullerud -- sufficient unto eternal life. And may we also be able to say with the Apostle Paul and Arvid Gullerud: I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH – through Jesus Christ my Lord! Amen.

If Our Heart Condemn Us

Arvid G. W. Gullerud

Note: This article first appeared in the March issue of Volume 44 of the *Journal of Theology*.

For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. 1 John 3:20

Are you sure that your sins are forgiven? Are you sure that you will finally go to heaven? Are you really sure? These are very important questions, for if a man is not sure of the forgiveness of sins, if he is not sure of his eternal salvation, then he must either run away from the realities of life or from the inevitable fears of death, only to find at the end of his life that he has made the greatest mistake a person can make in this world, and that he has lost his soul, or else he must live in tormenting doubt and uncomfortable insecurity that may finally lead him into complete hopelessness and despair.

We hear a great deal about security in our time, and the American people seem to think that if they are financially protected, they have real security, and they can have a life with real peace of mind. However, the only thing that a whole box full of insurance policies and a whole raft of government programs will protect is our bank account. A life insurance policy is not going to keep us from dying, and a hospital insurance policy is not going to keep us from getting sick.

We shall find real peace of mind and true peace of soul only when we have found a refuge in the precious blood of the crucified Christ, only when we have gained the assurance and certainty that through the blood of Christ our sins are forgiven and that by His grace we have the certain unfailing hope of everlasting life.

But if a person has that, then he or she has a solid ground on which to stand, then he has a mighty fortress from which he can conquer in all the battles of life. For if I know for sure that when I die I shall come into the glorious mansion of my Father's house in heaven, then I can face every difficulty, then I can bear every loss and every evil and every pain and still say with the psalmist: *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance* (Psalm 42:5). And it is just this security that we look for in our religion. And we shall find it, if we learn well the lesson taught in our text in which God's inspired apostle says: *If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.* May the Holy Spirit help us all as we study these words.

There is, or course, a false security in which people live. It is the security in which people do not see the sinfulness of their own lives and do not understand the meaning of the holiness and righteousness of God. Often we hear somebody say: "I am not afraid to die, because I have always tried to live a good life. I have always tried to be good." Such people, however, are not putting their trust in God, but in themselves, and to them the words of our text can offer no comfort. Their heart may not condemn them, but they ought to remember that God is greater than their heart and knows all things. Though they believe themselves to be righteous, yet God, who knows all their thoughts and all their desires, condemns them and all people, when He says in the Bible that all the world is guilty before God. *All have sinned and come short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23).

Strangest of all is this, that we sometimes find people who have gone to church all their lives, and who have heard the Word of God Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, and still they have not learned that in themselves they are lost and condemned sinners. At the death bed of a dying mother, after I had just assured the dying mother that she did not have to fear death and the judgment because the Lord Jesus had taken her sins away, I have heard a daughter say, "Pastor, that's what I always tell mother, too. She doesn't have to be afraid because she has been a good mother and tried the best she could to be good."

Others, who live in false security, admit that they are not perfect. They confess that they are sinners and have done wrong at least a few times in their lives. But they imagine since God is love, He will not punish sinners, that He will simply look with kindly tolerance upon their weaknesses and faults. But while God is a God of love and of mercy and of kindness—and such love and kindness and mercy that the world will never fully understand it—yet He is also a God of holiness and of justice. He will by no means clear the guilty, as the Bible says, unless in some way the penalty of their guilt is paid to the very last penny.

These people who think that God will not punish sin really make a false god for themselves in their own minds, a god that does not exist, and they might just as well carve their god out of wood and stone. They ought to remember what happened to the Son of God when the sins of the world were laid on Him, even though He prayed that the cup might pass from Him. For such people the words of our text were not written. Men, women, and children must learn to become unsure of themselves before they can become sure of God; they must learn to see their own insecurity without God before they can find security in God.

Our text speaks especially to people whose hearts condemn them, to people who know that they are sinners and who are afraid of becoming lost, to people whose hearts are sometimes filled with terror when they think of death and the last judgment.

We sometimes are inclined to think that when our hearts feel that way, that this is evidence that we have lost our faith and that there is no hope for us. Because of what we see in our hearts, we become unsure of our salvation and uncertain about the forgiveness of sins. Sometimes our heart condemns us under the prompting of the devil and tells us that perhaps Jesus died for us, but our sins are just too great to be forgiven.

But God is greater than our heart and knows all things. When God sent His Son into the world to lay down His life for our sins, He knew then already exactly what our sins would be, and still He tells us in His inspired Word that the Lord Jesus took away the sins of the world. Do you realize then what our heart is trying to tell us when it says that we are so bad that we can never get to heaven? It is actually trying to tell us that our sin is greater than God's grace, that it is greater than God's love, that it is greater than the work of Christ, and that God did not know what He was talking about when He said that the blood of Christ cleanses us from ALL sin. To talk that way about your sins is not humility, but unbelief. God is greater than our heart and knows all things, and when our heart tells us one thing and God tells us another, we have no business listening to this heart of ours.

Sometimes we find people who have no doubts about this, who are sure that the Lord Jesus paid for all the sins of the world, and yet they are disturbed by their sins and unsure of their salvation because their heart condemns them and tells them that they are not sorry enough for their sin. They would like to feel more sorry, and they think that they must repent more deeply before they can be forgiven. But when we feel that we cannot be forgiven because we are not sorry enough, we show that we still have a

tendency to trust in our own works to save us, and we still imagine that God will be merciful to us because of something we do.

But we ought to remember that God does not forgive us because we are sorry. He forgives us only because Jesus died for us. Sorrow over sin is not necessary to earn God's forgiveness. It could never do this, for the wages of sin is death and not tears. If you would cry a whole river of tears, this would not be enough to wash away one sin. The only thing that can do this is the blood of Christ. We sing:

Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone (TLH 376:2).

Sorrow over sin is necessary for one thing; to make us realize how much we need the Savior's forgiveness. If it has made us see that, it has done everything to us it is supposed to do. None of us is ever as sorry as we ought to be—someone has said that even the tears that we shed over our sins need to be washed—but we should let our sorrow drive us to trust only in the promises of God who is greater than our heart and knows all things.

We make a great mistake when we look for the certainty of salvation in our own heart in any way. Sometimes it actually happens that people who are convinced that the Lord Jesus is their Savior, who believe that the only way they can get to heaven is through the blood of Christ, look into their own hearts, and in their own eyes they are condemned and they say, "Oh, how I wish that I could believe that the Lord Jesus is my Savior! But I just can't believe it."

What they really mean is that they find it difficult to believe that they are believers. Their heart tells them that they are not believers at all. But again, they are making the mistake of thinking that their salvation depends on something they do.

The Lord Jesus died for all men, whether they are believers or not. If a person does not believe, this does not change the truth of God in any way. St. Paul says, "*If we are faithless, yet He remains faithful; He cannot deny himself*" (2 Timothy 2:13). And in another place he wrote: "*For what if some do not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not!*" (Romans 3:3-4). Whether I believe it or not, the Lord Jesus died for me. God's Word is true. His promise will be kept. That is what God tells us, and God is greater than our heart and knows all things. I ought to remember, too, that God does not forgive me because I believe. He forgives me only because of what Jesus has done. Our heart may tell us that Jesus did not die for us, but God's Word tells us that He did. Now which of the two should we believe? Our heart, which knows so little, or God, who knows all things?

Closely related to this problem is the one that people have when they say that they cannot feel that their sins are forgiven, when they feel instead that they are damned. But again, whether we are forgiven or not does not depend on what our heart feels and does. It depends only on what God has promised and on what the Savior has done for us. Someone once asked Dr. Martin Luther, "Do you feel that your sins are forgiven?" He answered: "No, I do not feel that my sins are forgiven, but I know it just as sure as there is a God in heaven, for feelings come and feelings go, but the Word of God shall forever stand." When the devil tells us that we are lost, and our hearts believe the devil and condemn us, we should never forget that God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. If we know how sinful we are, our hearts will condemn us again and again, but we remember that Paul once wrote: "*Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ that died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us*" (Romans 8:33-34).

When our hearts condemn us, there is always a higher court to which we can appeal. We carry our case from this little "justice-of-the-peace court" to the Supreme Court of heaven, and there is the Judge who tells us that for Jesus' sake, we are not guilty, that *though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow*. He tells us that *the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world*; he tells us that *the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin*. If God Himself tells us that, what business do our hearts have to tell us something else?

Are you sure, then, that your sins are forgiven? When we look at ourselves and our sins, we must often come close to despair, but when we look to God and to our crucified and risen Savior and to the promises that God has given us in Him, we can be sure, because God does not lie. Amen.

An Exegesis of Malachi 2:17-3:6

Andrew A. Schaller

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In about 444 B.C., Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to help rebuild the shattered walls of the city. When he arrived he found a people who were engaged in the sins that had caused the Babylonian Captivity in the first place. The situation was grave. The people were indifferent. They were intermarrying with their heathen neighbors and worshipping their false gods. They were cheating the LORD by not bringing their best heartfelt gifts of thanksgiving to Him. They had a false sense of security regarding their relationship with God. The priests were neglecting their duties. Instead of simply condemning and destroying His wayward people the Almighty had mercy and sent the prophet Malachi.

The message that the LORD of hosts gave to Malachi to proclaim is called a “burden” because it was a difficult message and a severe warning against the backsliding people of God. In striking fashion, the LORD speaks to His people, repeating His word of promise and then contrasting that word with their words of doubt and unbelief. It began in the first chapter with these words (Malachi 1:2, NKJV)¹: “I have loved you,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’”

The words, “Yet you say,” ring out in this short book from chapter to chapter (cf. 1:6-8, 13; 2:13-14) and call for the judgment of those who would question and deny the LORD of hosts.

Immediate Context

The second chapter begins with the LORD’s rebuke of the unfaithful priests. He warned them that if they did not give honor to His name they would be cursed (2:1-3). The LORD also compares and contrasts the service of a faithful Levite priest with the unfaithfulness of the current priests (2:4-9).

The priests were not the only ones unfaithful to the LORD. Many of the people of Judah had taken their love from the LORD and given it to other “gods.” Still they went through the motions in the temple and profaned the sanctuary of the LORD. They showed the ultimate disrespect for the LORD by coming to His temple to “worship” Him though they had in their hearts left Him.

They were also unfaithful to God’s commandments. Many divorced their wives and sought to marry heathen women. Still they wondered and whined, “Why doesn’t the Lord receive our offerings with favor?” What was the problem? Their sins had turned the LORD’s face from them (cf. Isaiah 59:2)². The previous section concluded with the sobering words (2:16b - ESV): “So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”³

“In this section the prophet’s words are directed against the spirit of discontent and murmuring which prevailed among the people, who lost faith in all the promises of God, because the expected manifestation of the glory of the Lord for the good of His People did not take place at once, and in their despair called even the holiness and justice of God in question, and began to deny the coming of the Lord to judge the world. The prophet lets the feelings of the people express themselves in ch. ii.17, for the purpose of meeting them with an announcement of the day of the Lord and its true nature, in ch. iii and iv.”⁴

MALACHI 2:17⁵

הוֹגֵרְתֶם יְהוָה בְּדַבְּשֵׁיכֶם וְאַמְשַׁתֶּם בְּמַה הוֹגֵרְנוּ בְּאַמְשַׁכֶּם כָּל־עֲשֵׂה שֶׁ טוֹב בְּפִינִי
יְהוָה וּבְהֶם הוּא חָקַץ אוֹ אֵיה אֱלֹהֵי הַמְּשַׁפֵּט:

Personal Literal Translation

You (pl.) have worn out Jehovah with your (pl.) words and you say, “With what have we worn out?” In the saying of them, “Everyone who is doing evil – good in the eyes of Jehovah and in them He Himself is in favor,” or, “where is the God of the judgment?”

NKJV

*You have wearied the LORD with your words;
“Yet you say,
“In what way have we wearied Him?”
In that you say,
“Everyone who does evil
Is good in the sight of the LORD,
And He delights in them,”
Or, “Where is the God of justice?”*

Vocabulary/Grammar

הוֹגֵגְתֶּם – **Hiph. perf. 2 m. pl.** – 1) To labor, especially with effort and become weary; 2) to be fatigued, wearied out... to weary someone, to be wearisome to someone, followed by an accusative of the person and כֹּ of the thing.

אָמַרְתֶּם -- **Qal perf. 2 m. pl.** -- To say, speak.

הוֹגֵגְתֶּם -- **Qal perf. 2 m. pl.** -- 1) To labor, especially with effort and become weary; 2) to be fatigued, wearied out.

אֶצְרֶךָ -- **Qal perf. 2 m. s.** – 1) To bend; 2) to incline, be favorable toward; a) to do something to will or desire, b) towards someone, i.e. to favor him, to delight in him as in God, in men; to love someone, followed by כֹּ.

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:6-7).

The LORD is indeed merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth . . . but even His patience was being strained by the words of His wayward people.

If there is one word that leaps off the page, it is הוֹגֵגְתֶּם.

The LORD of hosts, who neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:2,4), who neither faints nor is weary (Isaiah 40:28 – the same root verb is used) is worn out, wearied, tired out by the words of his unfaithful people.⁶

Why is the LORD wearied?

He is wearied because His unfaithful people are calling what is evil good (cf. again Isaiah, 5:20⁷). It appears that some were going so far as to attempt to justify their sinful deeds by suggesting that the LORD delighted in them. Sounds much like some today who try to absolve themselves and quiet the conscience by saying things like: “I can’t help it, God made me this way!” “God wants me to be happy, doesn’t he?”

Still worse, others seemed to be inviting the LORD’s judgment, talking like scoffers: “Where is the God of judgment?” “If what we are doing is wrong, then why doesn’t God judge us? Where is He?” Sounds similar to the tone of the scoffers foretold by Peter in his second epistle (2 Peter 3:3-4):

“. . . scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation.”

Even as some were scoffing then at the visitation of the LORD for judgment, so today scoffers snort at Christ's coming again in glory. But God is faithful. He who promised in time past to send the Christ has also chosen the day (Matthew 24:36) in which Christ will return to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

Those who were unfaithful to the LORD doubted that He would visit them. They asked: "Where is the God of judgment?" The LORD Himself is about to answer their wearying question -- the God of judgment was about to come suddenly to His temple.

MALACHI 3:1

הַנְּנִי שׁ לְהַ מְלַאכֵי וַיִּנְהַרְשֶׁךְ לְעֲנִי וַיִּתְאֵם יְבוֹא אֶל־הַיְכָלוֹ הָאֲדוֹן אֲשֶׁשׁ-אַתֶּם מְבַרְשִׁים¹
וּמְלַאכֵי הַבְּשִׁית אֲשֶׁשׁ-אַתֶּם חֲקֹקִים הִנֵּה-בָא אִמְשׁ יְהוָה קְבָאוֹת:

Personal Literal Translation

"Behold I myself will send My messenger and he shall prepare the way before My face and suddenly He shall come to His temple, the Lord which you (pl.) are seeking and the messenger of the Covenant which you (pl.) delight. Behold He is coming," He says Jehovah of hosts."

NKJV

*"Behold, I send My messenger,
And he will prepare the way before Me.
And the Lord, whom you seek,
Will suddenly come to His temple,
Even the Messenger of the covenant,
In whom you delight.
Behold, He is coming,"
Says the LORD of hosts.*

Vocabulary/Grammar

הַנְּנִי – **Particle, interj. with 1 s. suff.** -- Lo! Behold! Here! Here!

וַיִּנְהַרְשֶׁךְ – **Piel perf. 3 m. s.** – Piel, Properly, to cause to depart, hence, remove or take out of the way; to clear the way, to prepare.

מְבַרְשִׁים – **Piel part. m. s.** –Piel, To seek for, strive after.

If we wanted someone to notice something important, we might say to them: "Hey! Look at this!" Here the interjection הַנְּנִי -- translated "Behold" is surely meant to do the same. There are two important things to be considered. The word הִנֵּה is also repeated later on in the verse to confirm that what has been said will surely come to pass.

After getting our attention, the LORD of hosts promises (to me the added pronoun makes it emphatic) – "I myself will send My messenger to prepare the way before Me." Keil/Delitzsch adds this note: ". . . it was because the priests did not fulfill their duty as the ordinary ambassadors of God that the Lord was about to send an extraordinary messenger."⁸

Who is this messenger of Jehovah?

While the name Malachi means "my messenger" and this word was given to him to speak, Malachi is not the messenger of Jehovah referred to by these words. Rather, as the last chapter of this book foretells (Malachi 4:5-6 – one like Elijah) and the New Testament clarifies (Matthew 17:10-13), the LORD is speaking of the one also foretold by Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3-5), a voice crying in the wilderness . . . who came dressed in camel's hair and preaching repentance and faith in the coming Christ.

Jehovah promised that first "My messenger" would come and prepare the way before Him. The Lord Jesus Himself would later say in Matthew 11:7-15 (cf. also Mark 1:1-3, Luke 1:76, 7:27):

As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is *he* of whom it is written:

*‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.’*

“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

But there is more than one promise here and more than one messenger coming. The first messenger was to prepare the way for the second, the very Messenger of the covenant. Thus in the midst of Malachi’s burden comes the news that the people of God had been waiting for . . . for thousands of years. For the LORD of hosts also promised that the Messenger of the covenant would suddenly come to His temple.

Who is this Messenger of the covenant?

He is the LORD Himself. “The identity of the angel of the covenant with the ‘Lord’ is placed beyond the reach of doubt by the parallelism of the clauses, and the notion is thereby refuted that the ‘covenant angel’ is identical with the person previously mentioned . . .”⁹

God established the first covenant through Moses. But God also promised through the prophet Jeremiah to establish a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) in which He would forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more. Who is the messenger who would come and establish this new covenant?

It is the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Epistle to the Hebrews bears witness (Hebrews 8:7-13; 9:11-12,15; 12:24):

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. . . . And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Thus when the time was right (Galatians 4:4-5) the Messenger of the covenant, the Son of God made flesh came suddenly to His temple. “‘The Lord’ . . . is God; this is evident both from the fact that He comes to *His* Temple, i.e. the temple of Jehovah, and also from the relative clause ‘whom ye seek,’ which points back to the question, ‘Where is the God of judgment?’ (ch. ii. 17.)”¹⁰

Despite this prophecy, who was there waiting for His arrival (John 1:10-14)? There were only a few (e.g. Simeon – Luke 2:25-35; Anna – Luke 2:36-38), but their joy was full!

We still rejoice at His first coming in mercy and look forward to His second coming with joy. This is the case because we have been led by the Spirit to confess our sins and to trust in Christ for forgiveness. He is our advocate, our Savior and Lord.

But for those who have been unfaithful to the LORD and have forsaken Him, -- the prospect of His coming is and will be one of fear and terror.

MALACHI 3:2

וְמִי מְכַלְכֵּל אֶת-יּוֹם בּוֹאוֹ וְ מִי הֵעָמֵד בְּהִשָּׁאוֹתָו כִּי-הוּא כָּאֵשׁ מְקַשֵּׁפ וְכַבֵּשֵׁת מְכַבְּסִים:²

Personal Literal Translation

“and who is enduring the day of His coming and who is standing in his appearing? Because He like a fire goldsmith, and like soap from one who cleanses.”

NKJV

“But who can endure the day of His coming?”

*And who can stand when He appears?
For He is like a refiner's fire
And like launderers' soap.*

Vocabulary/Grammar

וּמִי – **Pron. Interrog.** -- Who? What?

מָדַדְתִּי – **Piel part. m. s.** – To measure, to take in, hold, contain; to hold up, sustain; to bear, endure.

מָדַדְתִּי – **Qal part. m. s.** – To stand, to stand before a king.

בִּהְשָׂאוֹתָו – **Niph. inf. const. with 3 m. s. suff.** – Niphal -- 1) To be seen 2) to let oneself be seen, to appear, used of persons, followed by אֵל. It is often used of Jehovah, or an angel, who appears.

מִקְשָׁפִי – **Piel part. m. s.** – Properly, the word means to melt, but the participle is used of a goldsmith, a person who melts.

וּכְבֹּשֵׁית – **Noun** – Properly, something that cleanses or has a cleansing property, especially salt or alkali, very often translated 'soap.'

מִמְבַּסִּים – **Piel part. m. s.** – Properly, to tread or trample with the feet, hence to wash garments by treading them under water, but the participle is used of a washer of garments or a fuller.

The idea of God's visitation or appearing for judgment is one found in a number of places in the Scripture. It is described as a great and fearful day for sinners who will not be able to endure His wrath over sin.

But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation (Jeremiah 10:10).

The LORD gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; Who can endure it? (Joel 2:11).

Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, And the rocks are thrown down by Him (Nahum 1:6).

Why is His coming so terrible? Because He is like the intense fire a refiner uses to burn the impurities from metals. He comes to consume sin and its consequences. In the next chapter of Malachi, the day of the LORD is described in this way:

"For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch" (4:1).

The LORD of hosts is also like a cleansing soap that removes every stain.

The coming of the LORD would forever be a day of terror for sinners were it not for Christ, and the revelation of what He accomplished when He came with mercy for sinners (Romans 5:6-11):

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

We have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son and therefore the prospect of His coming holds no terror. But for those without faith in Christ, who remain in their sins, the coming of the LORD to judge is (and should be) a terrifying thought.

The Psalmist expresses both the fearful problem of sin and the solution when he says (Psalm 130:3-4):

If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.

There is forgiveness with the LORD, who comes to establish justice in the earth (Isaiah 42:4). He comes not only to judge but also to purify His people, enabling them also to bring forth God pleasing fruits.

MALACHI 3:3

וְיֹשֵׁב מְקַשֵּׁף וּמְטַהֵשׁ כֶּסֶף וְטַהֵשׁ אֶת־בְּנֵי־לֵוִי וְזָקַר אֹתָם כְּזָהָב וְכִכְסֵּף וְהָיוּ לִיהוָה מְגִישֵׁי³
מִנְחָה בְקִדְוָה:

Personal Literal Translation

“And He shall sit for a goldsmith and for a purifier of silver. And He shall purify the sons of Levi and He shall refine them as gold and as silver, and they shall be to Jehovah caused to bring forth a gift (sg.) in righteousness.”

NKJV

*He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi,
And purge [or refine] them as gold and silver,
That they may offer to the LORD
An offering in righteousness.*

Vocabulary/Grammar

יָשָׁב– **Qal perf. 3 m. s.** – To sit, to sit down, often used of judges and kings who judge and rule from a seated position.

טָהַר-- **Piel perf. 3 m. s.** – To shine or be bright; to become clean or pure; **PIEL** – To purify or cleanse either physically or spiritually, to declare clean.

זָקַר-- **Piel perf. 3 m. s.** – To tie fast or bind; to squeeze through a strainer, hence to refine, used both of wine and metals; **Piel** – To refine, to purify.

הָיוּ-- **Qal perf. 3 m. pl.** – To be, to exist, to become.

מְגִישֵׁי-- **Hiph. part. pl. const.** – To draw near, approach, to come near; **Hiphil** – To cause to come near, to bring something.

When the LORD Himself appears, He will refine by purging of sin. When his priests, the sons of Levi, have been cleansed then they will again bring forth gifts in righteousness. It is necessary that the LORD first purify His people before they may bring forth godly fruits. As to why the sons of Levi are named specifically, Keil/Delitsch offers the following:

“Since they, the supporters and promoters of the religious life of the nation, were quite corrupt, the renovation of the national life must begin with their purification. . . . that they will attend to the offering of sacrifice in the proper state of heart, . . .”¹¹

This picture of the LORD first purifying His servants so that they may serve Him is one that is used elsewhere in Scripture. I can’t help but think of the vision of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8) and of these words (Isaiah 6:6-8):

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said:

“Behold, this has touched your lips;

Your iniquity is taken away,

And your sin purged.”

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

“Whom shall I send,

And who will go for Us?”

Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

It is also of note that after he had been cleansed that Isaiah said, “Here am I, Send me!”

“The Lord desires a pure product. ‘You shall be holy because your God is holy’ is a theme played often in the Bible. We can’t even be ninety-nine and a large fraction percent clean. But who can stand, if that is the case? Who can bring his offerings to his God knowing that he is completely 100 % pure? The answer is: God’s people can.”¹²

God has purified us, cleansed us of all sins through faith in Christ Jesus. Even though we are still (this side of heaven) hindered by our sinful flesh, the Spirit of God creates in us the desire (cf. Philippians 2:13) to serve Him, to cry out: “Here am I, Send me!”

We would serve Him in a godly manner. Praise God that He accepts our imperfect service because of Christ our Lord (1 Peter 2:4-5):

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

MALACHI 3:4

וְהָיָה לַיהוָה מִנְחָת יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׁוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשָׁנִים רַדְמֵ נְיוֹת׃⁴

Personal Literal Translation

“And it shall be pleasant to Jehovah a gift of Judah and Jerusalem as in days long past and as in years former.”

NKJV

*“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem
Will be pleasant [or pleasing] to the LORD,
As in the days of old,
As in former years.*

Vocabulary/Grammar

וְהָיָה Qal perf. 3 f. s. – To mix, to weave, to exchange, to barter, to become surety, to pledge, to be sweet or pleasant (well mixed) followed by ל of pers., e.g. sleep, sacrifices, gifts.

מִנְחָת– Noun, f. s. const. – A gift, a tribute, a sacrifice.

עוֹלָם-- Noun, m. s. – Properly, what is hidden, hidden time, eternity, of time long past, from a long time ago.

רַדְמֵ נְיוֹת– Adj. f. pl. – In front, anterior, oriental, eastern, old, ancient, former.

After having been purified by the LORD, the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem would again be pleasing to the LORD as in former years.

What is meant by “former years”? Well, since names and dates are not mentioned I’m hesitant to say more than – in former years when the people and their priests were faithful to the Lord. Fear not though, Keil/Delitzsch does not hesitate to offer possible eras:

“The days of the olden time and years of the past are the times of Moses, or the first years of the sojourn in the desert (Jer. ii:2), possibly also the times of David and of the first years of the reign of Solomon; whereas now, i.e. in the time of Malachi, the sacrifices of the nation were displeasing to God, not merely on account of the sins of the people (ch. ii:13), but chiefly on account of the badness of the sacrificing priests (i:10, 13).”¹³

MALACHI 3:5

וְרִשְׁבֹתִי אֲלֵיכֶם לְמִשְׁפָּט וְהִיִּיתִי כַד מְמַהֵשׁ בְּמִכְשָׁעִים וּבְמִנְאָעִים וּבְנִשְׁבָּרִים לְשָׂרֵשׁ⁵
וּבְעֵשְׂרֵי שָׂכָשֶׁכִּישׁ אֲלִמְנָה וְיִתּוֹם וּמִטִּי־גֶשׁ וְלֹא יִשְׁאוּנִי אָמֵשׁ יְהוָה קָבָאוֹת׃

Personal Literal Translation

“And I will draw near to them for judgment. I will be a witness hurrying on those practicing sorcery, and on those committing adultery, and on those who have sworn to lies and on those who are defrauding a hireling, widow, and an orphan, and those causing to be turned away a stranger, and they will not fear me, says Jehovah of hosts.”

NKJV

*And I will come near you for judgment;
I will be a swift witness
Against sorcerers,
Against adulterers,
Against perjurers,
Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans,
And against those who turn away an alien—
Because they do not fear Me,”
Says the LORD of hosts.*

Vocabulary/Grammar

וְרָשַׁבְתִּי – **Qal perf. 1 s.** – To approach, come near.

וְהָיִיתִי – **Qal perf. 1 s.** – To be, to become.

מְמַהֵשׁ – **Part. m. s.** – To be quick or skillful. Piel – To hasten, to make haste, to quicken, to be prompt.

בְּמִכְשָׁפִים – **Piel m. pl. m. pl.** – Properly, to pray or offer prayer or worship, but in Hebrew this is restricted to idols, thus to use enchantment and the participle is used of an enchanter, magician, or sorcerer.

וּבְמִנְאָצִים – **Piel part. m. pl.** – To commit adultery, used of both male and female.

וּבְנִשְׁבָּרִים – **Niph. part. m. pl.** – To swear.

לְשָׁרֵשׁ – **Noun m. s.** – A lie, a liar, whatever deceives, defrauds, vanity.

וּבָעֵשְׂרִי – **Qal part. pl. const.** – To oppress, act towards, treat unjustly or violently; to defraud, to extort.

שְׂכָר – **Noun m. s. const.** – Wages of.

שָׂכִיר – **Adj. m. sg.** – Hireling.

וּמִטֵּי – **Hiph. part. pl. m. const.** – To stretch out, extend. Hiphil – To extend, to stretch out the hand; to expand; to incline; to turn, to turn away.

יִשְׁאוּנִי – **Qal perf. 3 pl. with 1 sg. pron. suff. --** To fear, to be afraid, to revere, to tremble.

The LORD would not only draw near to purify those who were repentant, but also to judge those who were not. He will be a swift witness against unrepentant sinners. Rather than speak generally of sin, the LORD through Malachi mentions sins that were prevalent in Judah (and also in our day). Those who weary the LORD by claiming that He is unfair will see on the day of His coming a grand show of His justice.

Sorcerers – It’s interesting that the root word means to pray, to offer prayers or worship--but the participle is used of proponents of false religions in Egypt and Babylon. Those who serve and worship idols will be judged by the One True God.

Adulterers – Those who commit sexual sin (used of both male and female) will also stand before the Judge and unless they repent and trust in the Christ will be condemned. I’m reminded of what another brother said in referring to the words of Hebrews 13:4 – those who commit adultery put themselves in the crosshairs of God’s judgment. Well said.

Perjurers – Literally ‘those who have sworn to lies.’ I can’t help but wonder how many people in our age take seriously placing their hands upon the Bible and promising – “I hereby solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth...so help me God.” Do they consider that they are calling upon God to bear witness to the truth and punish the liar? The LORD God certainly warns about all swearing that is done dishonestly or thoughtlessly (cf. Leviticus 19:12; James 5:12).

Swindlers – Those who defraud their employees and widows and orphans. Those who do not pay the fair wage agreed upon will have to answer to God. The cries of those defrauded in this manner reach the LORD of hosts (cf. James 5:1-5). It seems hardly a day goes by and the news reports some new scam aimed at seasoned citizens and the unfortunate. None of these things go unnoticed by the just Judge of all who warns about defrauding one’s fellow man (cf. Leviticus 19:13) and widows and orphans (Exodus 22:22).

Those who turn away an alien – Upon first reading I read this as saying, ‘Don’t turn the foreigner away from the LORD.’ However, those more intelligent than I say that the idea is rather ‘Don’t oppress a stranger unjustly.’ Certainly both ideas are contrary to the will of God.

“Verse 5 closes this section by reminding God’s people that he is the God who judges those intent on covering up the truth with a lie...sorcerers in the field of religion, adulterers in human relationships, perjurers in courts. He also is the God of the underdog championing the cause of the defense-less: the laborer, the widows, the fatherless, the aliens. He calls the wicked to justice because they do not fear him; and it is this very lack of fear that makes them bold to perpetrate their lies and their evil deeds. They will hear the verdict: contempt of court, contempt of the first commandment.”¹⁴

MALACHI 3:6

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה לֹא שֹׁנֵי תִי וְאַתֶּם בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא כִלִּיתֶם:

Personal Literal Translation

“For I Jehovah, I do not change and you (pl.) sons of Jacob you are not destroyed.”

NKJV

“For I am the LORD, I do not change;

Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.”

Vocabulary/Grammar

שֹׁנֵי תִי – Qal perf. 1 Sg. – שָׁנָה – The root means 1) to repeat, to do the same time and again; 2) to be different from; 3) to alter, change, be changed, changeable, given to change.¹⁵

כִּלִּיתֶם – Qal perf. 2 m. pl. – To be completed, finished, to be past, gone by; to be consumed, spent, to be wasted, destroyed, perish

It is because the LORD does not change that neither does His mercy and love. So it is also written in Lamentations (3:22):

Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed,

Because His compassions fail not.

It is His mercy that sent Malachi to a wayward people. It is His mercy that sent John to prepare the hearts of the people for the Christ. It is His mercy that sent His Son to make atonement for our sins. Praise God that He is the God of mercy who does not change!

Endnotes

¹ Unless otherwise noted Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version, Copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson: Nashville.

² These words from Isaiah seem particularly applicable here: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

³ English Standard Version, Copyright 2001, Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.

4. Keil and Delitzsch *Old Testament Commentaries, Volume 6 – Ezekiel XXV to Malachi*, Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., Pg. 1531.
 5. All Hebrew quotations are from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*: With Westminster Hebrew Morphology, 1996, c1925; morphology c1991. German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary; Stuttgart; Glenside PA; Logos Research Systems, Inc: Bellingham, WA
 6. A similar sentiment is expressed in Isaiah 43:22-24, when it is revealed that Israel is weary of calling on the LORD (the weak are tired of calling on the strong?), whom they have wearied with their iniquities.
 7. “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).
 8. Keil and Delitzsch Vol 6, p. 1532 [1533]. [Two pages were transposed in printing; the page numbered 1532 is properly 1533.]
 9. Keil and Delitzsch Vol. 6, p.1534.
 10. Keil and Delitzsch, Vol. 6, p. 1532 [1533].
 11. Keil and Delitzsch Vol. 6, p. 1535.
 12. Hartzell, Eric S., *People’s Bible Commentary – Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* Northwestern Publishing House, Copyright 1991, p. 142.
 13. Keil and Delitzsch, Vol. 6, 1535-1536.
 14. Hartzell, p. 142.
 15. *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* by Benjamin Davidson, Hendrickson Publishing from the edition first published by Samuel Bagster and Sons Ltd.; London, 1848, 2nd Edition 1850.
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An Exegetical Study of Romans 9:1-9

Frank Gantt

The following is a revised version of an essay first presented at the 2004 West-Central Pastoral Conference. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James, unless otherwise noted. The citation of quoted material was given parenthetically according to MLA guidelines.

Introduction

John Schaller, quoting Luther, writes:

This epistle is truly the chief part of the New Testament and the purest gospel, being so valuable altogether that a Christian might well not only memorize it word by word, but keep in touch with it every day, as with the daily bread for his soul. For it can never be read or considered too much or too well, and the more it is handled, the more precious does it become, and the better does it taste. (215)

The theme of the entire letter to the Romans is found in 1:16-17: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”*” It is Paul’s purpose, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to present in its *full sweetness* this “*power of God*” that his readers may be so comforted and drawn by it that they appropriate this message to themselves and thereby obtain salvation.

To carry out this objective, Paul begins in the early chapters to unfold his message by demonstrating from the outset that all are in desperate need of the gospel of Christ. Apart from it they are under the “*wrath of God*” (1:18) being incapable of attaining to the righteousness demanded by the law.

Jew and Gentile alike have no hope in the law. All are left dumbfounded by the law for by it “*is the knowledge of sin*” (3:20).

Hope is found in Christ, because He is the “*one Man*” by whom “*many will be made righteous*” (5:19). It was by His blood that propitiation was made and all those who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God are now “*justified freely by [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (3:24). But this hope comes to the sinner individually only “*by faith*.” That phrase is echoed throughout the letter as Paul stresses again and again that justification, salvation, and the righteousness that avails before God are but a gift of God’s grace and cannot be attained by obedience to the law. It is the promise of God’s grace by which sinners are saved. A promise is received only by faith. Even Abraham had nothing to boast of before God, but he believed God, and God counted that faith to him as righteousness (cf. 4:1).

In chapter six Paul anticipates the rejection of those who, at least in part, hold to the law as a means to be justified. The gospel of Christ DOES NOT open the door for rebellion and sin so “*that grace may abound*” (6:1). In fact, those who have received God’s declaration of “*not guilty*” are dead to sin as they have been made partakers in Christ’s death through baptism. In chapters 6-8 Paul reminds his readers, though, that it is not the law that is able to empower the Christian in his service to God. The law will only enslave further. The Christian is not under the dominion of the law, but under the powerful guidance of the gospel. Concluding chapter eight, Paul seems to drift off course as he expresses his Spirit worked joy and confidence that the child of God stands justified by the highest and only court—God Himself. Not even the devil and his angels can separate the justified sinner from the love of God which is found in Christ Jesus.

In his summary remarks on chapter eight, Lenski says, “The results of justification are thus fully presented (chapters 5 to 8). No one has ever set them forth so compactly and so profoundly, in a way that is so stimulating, effective, and uplifting. And all this in a letter to a single congregation! These are, indeed, chapters in which every Christian should immerse his soul.” (578)

Then comes chapter nine, a portion of which we are considering at this time. Many commentators scratch their heads at the apparent shift in Paul’s subject matter. Some of them suggest that the epistle may have been interrupted at the conclusion of chapter eight and that a new subject matter entered the apostle’s mind when he began again. However, as we will see, the matter of faith is integral in Paul’s remarks in this chapter and he goes even further in his application of justification by faith than he had in the previous chapters. We turn our attention now to this deeper application.

Verses 1 & 2

Ἀλήθειαν λέγω ἐν Χριστῷ, οὐ ψεύδομαι, συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεώς μου ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, ὅτι λύπη μοί ἐστιν μεγάλη καὶ ἀδιάλειπτος ὁδύνη τῆ καρδία μου.

I am speaking truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit that there is a great sorrow to me and an unceasing pain in my heart.

Ἀλήθειαν λέγω ἐν Χριστῷ, οὐ ψεύδομαι

The positioning of ἀλήθειαν is emphatic and it is followed by “*in Christ*” which further emphasizes the truthfulness of what Paul is about to say. Apart from Christ, one might “*understandably*” maintain a hostile attitude toward those who caused so much turmoil in his life, such as the Jews did for Paul (cf. Acts 13:50, 14:2, 14:19, et al.). However, Paul can properly call on Christ as a witness because Christ had worked His own sincere love for sinners within him, even a love for those who were enemies of Christ.

Emphasizing the truthfulness of his upcoming statement yet again, Paul says, “*I am not lying*.” No one should take Paul’s comments in chapters two through four as though he harbors hatred toward his own countrymen. What he is about to say does not contradict what he previously

had written.

συμμαρτυρούσης μοι τῆς συνειδήσεώς μου ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ

Here we have a genitive absolute construction.

Why does Paul make use of his conscience as a witness? How does his conscience provide testimony to others? Its testimony to the Romans was indirect. Paul’s conscience bore witness to himself first of all. Though in his mind he could think that he is telling the truth, one’s conscience verifies or contradicts one’s own thinking. It is as Lenski says, “Conscience is another voice, one that cannot be bribed, one that speaks independently and unhesitatingly contradicts us if we are wrong or false.” (582)

So strong is Paul’s love for his people by birth that he presents not just two witnesses, but two sets of witnesses: himself with Christ and his conscience with the Holy Spirit. The matter is resolved—Paul is sincere and truthful in his desire for his “*relatives* [NKJV margin] *according to the flesh.*”

ὅτι λύπη μοί ἐστιν μεγάλη καὶ ἀδιάλειπτος ὁδύνη τῇ καρδίᾳ μου

Great sorrow (λύπη ... μεγάλη) was continually in Paul’s heart because the Jews as a nation rejected the only Messiah that would ever come, namely Jesus Christ. One is reminded of Christ as He stood outside of Jerusalem and wept over their unwillingness to be gathered together under the Savior’s gracious arms. They desired a relationship with God, but they cast off and killed the only Way by which they might possess it.

Paul’s sorrow was so intense that he also carried around with him ἀδιάλειπτος ὁδύνη, unceasing pain, within his heart. In *Word Pictures*, Robertson likens Paul’s description here to *angina pectoris*, or a heart attack. () For the child of God, the condemnation that awaits those who reject “*the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (3:24) becomes anguish to himself since he now has the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) and is therefore also “*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9).

Verses 3-5

ἠύχουμένη γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα, οἵτινες εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται, ὧν ἡ υἰοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι, ὧν οἱ πατέρες, καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὃ ὧν ἐπὶ πάντων, θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν

Indeed, I could want to be a cursed one myself—away from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my relatives according to the flesh, who are Israelites, whose are the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the lawgiving and the service and the promises, of whom are the fathers and from whom is Christ according to the flesh who is over all, God worthy of praise into eternity. Amen.

ἠύχουμένη γὰρ ἀνάθεμα εἶναι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ

ἠύχουμένη has as its definition “to pray or ask for,” but in this verse it is suggested to interpret it “to want or wish for.” In the imperfect it “**is used to express a wish politely or hesitantly ... This is called the ‘potential imperfect.’**” (Chamberlain, 75) Robertson uses the same terminology on page 886.

Lenski (583) notes that the γὰρ is confirmatory, not causal. Here we use the translation *indeed.*

Most translators treat ἀνάθεμα as a verb (be accursed), but it is a noun. With the infinitive the translation more accurately reads: *to be a cursed one.*

Paul does not carelessly cast aside his own relationship with Christ, but emphatically

impresses upon his readers that his love for his “brothers” is indeed great and true. Were it possible, he is willing to give up his own salvation for them. These words should not sound strange or improper to us as though Paul were squandering his own salvation. Christ has left His disciples “*an example, that you should follow His steps*” (1 Peter 2:21). Christ demonstrated “greater love” when He became a curse for us. Paul desires merely to follow the steps of his Lord and become cursed, that is, condemned by God, that others may enjoy the gift of everlasting life.

But, alas! That is an impossibility because one is justified “by faith” in the promise, not by another’s desire. Paul could no more give salvation to the Jews by becoming a curse for them than he could by believing the Gospel of Christ for them.

ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου

The curse to which Paul refers: away from Christ. How dreadful a thought! In Christ is redemption and justification and salvation. “*Away from Christ*” the sinner is lost, accursed, and eternally condemned. But this he is almost willing to endure (if it were possible, for salvation is a gift received through faith in Christ, whom the Jews rejected) for the sake of and in the place of the Jews, whom he refers to as “*my brothers*,” another expression of his love for them.

τῶν συγγενῶν μου κατὰ σάρκα

The Jews were brothers and relatives, and as such were causes for Paul’s affection. Yet, though Paul seems to use the κατὰ σάρκα in a positive manner, one can’t help but notice that there is the desire for a stronger relationship, a more heavenly one in Christ. They were only relatives according to the flesh. There was no spiritual relationship because we are fellow “*sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26) alone.

οἵτινές εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται

Note that Paul uses the term *Israelites*, but not Israel. They were a nation of people descended from Jacob and as such were recipients of many and great privileges. However, this does not mean they are the descendents which God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul will elaborate on this in the upcoming verses. For now, the thought is much like what Paul says in 3:1-2: “*What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.*”

ᾧν ἡ υἰοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι

What blessings the Jewish nation had! What advantage! What opportunity! God called them “*My son*” (Exodus 4:23), visibly made His presence among them in the cloud (1 Kings 8:10-11), called them to be His people (Exodus 6:7), gave them the Mosaic Law by which they were governed as a people (Exodus 24:12), invited them to worship Him (Psalm 50:15), and delivered to them through the prophets the promises concerning the Messiah (Jeremiah 7:25). These were a people richly blessed by God. To hate them would be to hate those whom the Lord had loved. To curse them would be to curse those whom the Lord had blessed.

ᾧν οἱ πατέρες

From Israel came the faithful followers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses and the prophets; the judges and the good kings. No other nation could lay claim to so many heroes of faith.

καὶ ἐξ ᾧν ὁ χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα

Finally, as above all other advantages, the Jews had the privilege of being the race from whom

the Seed of the woman came into the world. Jesus emphasized this truth to the Samaritan woman at the well: *You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is from the Jews* (John 4:22). The Son of God became a man, and that Man was of the tribe of Judah, and thus was a Jew.

ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων, θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν

Yet, Christ was not produced by the Jews but was only born among them. Paul makes a confession of the faith by which he also obtained righteousness. This Jesus is Lord and God, worthy to receive praise throughout eternity for taking on human flesh and coming in the likeness of man and humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. For such grace and mercy, we join Paul in praise to the Lord Christ and offer our own “AMEN!”

There are, of course, those who would engage in grammatical gymnastics at this point and seek to twist these words so as to refrain from giving glory to Christ. The Jehovah’s Witness, for example, propose the following as a translation of Paul’s words: “And from whom the Christ sprang according to the flesh: God, who is over all, be blessed forever. Amen.” The punctuation of the UBS text which is printed above, puts a period in between *σάρκα* and *ὁ*, thereby also disassociating Paul’s doxology from Christ. The most reliable Greek grammarians find fault with this punctuation. Robertson says, “To make a full stop after *σάρκα* (or colon) and start a new sentence for the doxology is very abrupt and awkward.” (Word Pictures,)

The apostle Paul makes clear confessions of Christ’s deity in other places so that no matter the punctuation above, Paul’s faith and doctrine is evident. In Acts 20:28 Paul, speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus says, “*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His blood*” [Emphasis added]. Again, in Titus 2:13-14 we read these words from Paul, “*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, ...*” Of course, those who reject Christ’s divinity continue to do their back-flips and somersaults in a vain attempt to rob Christ of the glory which He had from eternity (cf. John 17:5). They do so to their own condemnation, for “[h]e who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:23). That is the sad journey which the Jews, by and large, took.

Verses 6-7

Οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ, οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ· οὐδ’ ὅτι εἰσὶν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ’· Ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα.

But it is not as though the word of God has fallen because not all the ones from Israel are Israel, nor (is it) that they are the seed of Abraham. They are all children; still “It is in Isaac the seed will be called for you.”

Οὐχ οἶον δὲ ὅτι ἐκπέπτωκεν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ

After breaking out into a brief song of praise to his Savior God, Paul goes back to the subject at hand. The fact that the Israelites rejected Jesus Christ does not mean that the word of God was preached all those many years from the days of Abraham to his present without effectiveness. As the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection spread throughout the world, Paul found his spiritual family growing. Abraham’s descendants according to promise were growing more and more numerous as the Holy Spirit continued to add to the church the number of people who were being saved by faith.

It is not possible for the word of God to fall and fail. Through the prophet Isaiah God promises, “*The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever*” (40:8). Man’s rejection of God’s promise does not bring God’s word to nothing. It stands forever. So sure is God’s word that all of man’s attempts to silence it eventually fall by the wayside, yet God’s word continues on. It will continue to be the means by which God calls sinners to repentance and to everlasting life in Christ Jesus.

οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ, οὗτοι Ἰσραὴλ

If God's promises had been made to physical Jews and not all physical Jews were blessed with faith, does that make God faithless and His Word faithless? Paul's answer is that the unbelieving Jews were not true descendants of Abraham. They have the flesh but not the faith. They are children of the flesh only, like Ishmael.

οὐδ' ὅτι εἰσὶν σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ

The above translation of this phrase is slightly different than it is rendered in the NKJV and other popular translations. The following comes from NKJV: “nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham.” This exegete has chosen to separate the πάντες τέκνα from this particular phrase, leaving us with the translation, “nor is it that they are the seed of Abraham.” Lenski explains:

The usual rendering is that of our versions: “neither because they are Abraham's seed are they all children.” The trouble with this translation is that it makes “seed” mean physical seed, and “children” spiritual children; whereas in the quotation which at once follows “seed” is spiritual seed, and in the explanation (v. 8) “children” is differentiated: “the children of the flesh,” “the children of God,” “the children of the promise.” ... We thus accept as the correct rendering: “nor (is it this way) that they are Abraham's seed,” i.e., all those derived from Israel. Not all of them are “Israel” or “seed of Abraham” in the true or spiritual sense. (591)

πάντες τέκνα, ἀλλ' Ἐν Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεται σοι σπέρμα

At this point a new sentence begins: (They are) all children, still, “In Isaac your seed will be called.” Paul references God's response to Abraham when Sarah complained, “the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son” (Genesis 21:10). Abraham was heartbroken at the choice that confronted him, but God spoke to Him, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called” (Genesis 21:12) Ishmael was just as much a son of Abraham as was Isaac, and as such, Abraham loved Ishmael. However, the promised Seed according to God's promise, would not come through man's will and design.

All fleshly attempts to come into a spiritual relationship with God are impossibilities because of sin which thoroughly corrupts all of man's works. Yet, the Jews attempted just that when they felt they could enter into a relationship with God simply because they were physical descendants of Abraham. Ishmael, too, was a physical descendant of Abraham. But the promise to bless all the nations would continue through Isaac. Ishmael also had a reason to hope, but not in his physical descent from Abraham, but rather because of God's promise to Abraham, his father, and to Isaac, his step-brother.

Verses 8-9

τοῦτ' ἔστιν, οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογίζεται εἰς σπέρμα· ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος οὗτος· Κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐλεύσομαι καὶ ἔσται τῇ Σάρρα υἱός.

That is, it is not the children of the flesh which are the children of God but rather the children of the promise are counted as the seed, because this word is one of promise: At this time I will come and there will be a son to Sarah.

τοῦτ' ἔστιν, οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ

Paul offers explanation with τοῦτ' ἔστιν: “that is (to say) ...” God's promise never meant to include those who were mere physical descendants of Abraham. Abraham's relationship with God was a matter of faith, not of flesh. Nor would it be that Abraham's descendants could lay claim to being children of God simply because of their ancestry.

ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογίζονται εἰς σπέρμα

The ἀλλὰ offers an emphatic alternative: “*the children of the promise are counted as the seed.*” These children find their beginnings in the promises (τῆς ἐπαγγελίας is ablative of source) of God. Again, the promises are received by faith. Just as “*Abraham believed God and it (that is, his faith) was accounted to him for righteousness*” (4:3), so also “*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith*” on all those who believe (1:17). Through faith in the promises of God in connection with Jesus Christ, sinners are credited with righteousness and so become children to Abraham and sons of God.

ἐπαγγελίας γὰρ ὁ λόγος οὗτος

ἐπαγγελίας is in the emphatic position. The promise of God continues to be the focal point of Paul’s discussion. Our salvation is to be traced always and only back to God’s promises in His Word. We are directed away from faith, as though it were a work, and to the promises of God. Salvation, then, rests on something more certain than our fickle emotions and decisions. Salvation is a matter of God’s promise, even as the following was a matter of God’s promise and not man’s choice.

Κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐλεύσομαι καὶ ἔσται τῇ Σάρρα υἱός

Here there can be no doubt that Paul references a statement of God in which is found nothing else but a promise. Sarah was past child-bearing age. She herself had already “faced the facts” that she had missed the opportunity to have children. She was old. How could a child come to her? Certainly by no desire and work of man, but according to God’s promise alone.

One can’t help but think of the promise that God made years later to another woman, who because of her status of being a virgin, wondered how she might bring forth a Son. Sarah’s son, Isaac, was a gift given by promise to her and to Abraham. Mary’s Son, Jesus, was given by promise to the world. From Him and through Him, Abraham has received many more children, more numerous than the stars of the sky. They are his spiritual descendants in that they all share the faith he had in his Seed, who is Jesus, the Savior.

Conclusion

Paul stresses that salvation has always been a matter of faith and not a matter of physical descent. For us, it bears repeating: we are no more assured of paradise because we are descendants of confessional Lutherans or that our parents and grandparents were believers in Christ. It is “by faith” that the sinner is saved, not by genealogy. The promise of salvation is found only in Christ, and all those, but only those, who believe in Him obtain that promise. Reject Him, and you reject salvation, regardless of your ancestry. Believe on Him and you will be counted as the seed of Abraham, yes, but even more, a child of God.

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Emphasizing the Means of Grace in Our Preaching and Ministering

Luke Bernthal

The following is an edited version of an essay first presented to the 2012 West-Central Pastoral Conference held in Rapid City SD.

In some ways it's hard to believe that a paper like this even needs to be written. It seems a bit like saying, "When describing the sun, emphasize its brightness." Or, "When breathing, make sure to inhale and exhale." It simply goes without saying . . . doesn't it . . . shouldn't it? When it comes to our preaching and our ministering as servants of the gospel isn't it a foregone conclusion that we *will* emphasize the means of grace; the gospel in word and sacrament? After all, the reason for doing so should be as obvious as the sun in the sky: "***The gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes***" (Romans 1:16a, emphasis added).

Pastor Andrew Schaller put it very well when he wrote:

WHY EMPHASIZE THE MEANS OF GRACE?

*The gospel of Christ is the dynamite of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. The gospel in word and sacrament is the power in our ministries. It is the power that converts, preserves and strengthens. We shouldn't have to leave ourselves a sticky note lest we forget to emphasize the means of grace--because it is the power for our breath, life and walk as Christians. It should be natural for Lutheran Christians to point first and primarily to the means of grace.*¹

We all know that this is not always natural for us. As imperfect preachers and ministers of Christ we imperfectly preach and minister the gospel of Christ. This fact is, of course, all the more reason for those of us who are ministers of Christ to rejoice in the means of grace and the forgiveness they convey. Why then, besides the obvious reason of our own sinfulness, do we not always emphasize the means of grace as we should?

"Understanding" and "Importance"

I believe that two of the reasons the means of grace are not always emphasized as they should be in our ministries are a lack of *understanding* the means of grace and a lack of realizing the importance of the means of grace. Gaining a better *understanding* of the means of grace and their *importance*, I believe, will move us to emphasize them more in our preaching and ministering.

What Does "Means of Grace" Mean?

We pastors, and probably our recent confirmands, and maybe (maybe) some of our more astute and faithful Bible class attendees know that the means of grace is "the gospel in word and sacrament." But I have my doubts that the average churchgoer in our synod would know what this term means. I am not trying to be mean, but even for those who know what the phrase means, does the expression "means of grace" readily bring to mind what we mean it to mean (see what I mean)? Is there, or are there, better ways of saying or conveying this concept? Do not get me wrong, I am not in any way advocating the abandonment of this phrase, but I do find it to be one of the least understood terms we use in the Lutheran Church. Since it is such an important concept I do believe it is important that we find ways to convey it as simply and clearly as possible to our listeners and students.

Part of the problem is that nowadays we don't often use the term "means" in the way it is used in the phrase "means of grace," so finding some other word or short phrase to explain what we mean by "means" is important. What we mean by the expression, "means of grace" is: *The ways in which God*

gives and conveys His grace. However, using the expression “the ways of grace” seems less clear than the expression “means of grace.” The dictionary/index of our catechism lists part of the definition of “means of grace” as “[t]ools the Holy Spirit uses to create and preserve faith.”² That is a good and clear way of putting it, but somehow “tools of grace” doesn’t seem fitting either.

Perhaps a good way to convey to our people what we mean by the expression “means of grace” is to define the term with a short and clear phrase (like our catechism does as we noted above) and use an easily understood illustration to help solidify the concept in the hearer’s mind. One illustration that I have used with my confirmation students is this:

How is water brought into your house? **Answer:** Through pipes and faucets. That is the way (or the “means”) by which water is brought into your house.

In the same way, how is God’s grace (the “living water,” “water of life”) given to you? **Answer:** Through the gospel in both the word (the Bible) and the sacraments (Baptism is water plus God’s word, and the Lord’s Supper is bread and wine plus God’s word). That is the way (or the “means”) by which God’s grace is given to you.

Are there expressions or definitions that you have used, or illustrations that you’ve come up with or read that help convey more clearly what is meant by the phrase “means of grace?”

The Importance of the “Means of Grace”

If you’ve ever attempted to complete a job using the wrong tool, then you know how important it is to have the right tool for the job. God has given us His “tools” to create and sustain faith—and only these tools: The gospel in the word and the sacraments! He has chosen to use no other means to bring the gifts of His saving grace to people. Let’s not make the mistake, however, of thinking of these “tools” God uses as completely separate from each other or unconnected to each other. The “means of grace” is—not are—the gospel. You might think of the “means of grace” as a powerful three-pronged “trident” with which the Triune God accomplishes His saving work in the hearts of human beings.

The Word

The meaning and importance of God’s Word as a “means of grace” is obvious: It is the “means,” the way, by which God speaks to us. It is the way in which He conveys His message that He has brought salvation to the world through His Son Jesus’ saving work. It is this gospel message that creates and sustains saving faith.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

Baptism

The meaning and importance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as “means of grace” are maybe not as easily understood. However, when we look at what the Scriptures have to say about the sacraments, their meaning and importance become apparent.

Let’s take a look at what the Bible has to say about Baptism as a way in which God gives us His grace. In his book, *Baptized into God’s Family*, A. Andrew Das elaborates on several Bible passages concerning baptism:

Already at Pentecost, Peter says in Acts 2:38 **“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for [emphasis original] (Greek: “eis”) the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** “So that,” “into,” or “for” are correct translations of the Greek preposition “eis.” “Eis” means literally “into” here. In other words, baptism actually takes us “into” the forgiveness of our sins. That’s the wonderful promise God has given us all in baptism! . . .

But is the forgiveness offered in baptism a grace apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ? Isn’t it the gospel alone that saves? How does water baptism fit in? . . . ³

The power of baptism is in the gospel of Christ as declared and decreed in his Word. . . . He has simply promised to work in the waters of baptism. Thus, it is very evangelical. Christ’s action alone is the power of baptism. . . . (emphasis original).

St. Paul also stresses over and over again God’s saving work in baptism. Paul speaks of baptism in Romans 6:3-14. Note especially verses 3 and 4. There Paul writes: **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried with him by [emphasis original] baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life.”** In baptism our old sinful nature is nailed with Christ to the cross (verse 6). In baptism we die with Christ and are raised with him. Baptism takes us into an intimate and special union with our Lord . . . There his saving work on the cross becomes a work for each of us personally. For this reason, infants need baptism to free them from the curse of their sinful flesh. Baptism is not a mere symbol of God’s forgiveness. Romans 6 emphasizes that by means of baptism (emphasis original) we share in Christ’s death and so live a new life.

Colossians 2:12 speaks of the same truth: **“and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”** (emphasis original.)⁴

Let’s also not forget what the apostle Peter wrote concerning baptism’s forgiving, saving power and connection with the resurrection of Jesus Christ: [In reference to Noah and the waters of the flood] **“Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”** (1 Peter 3:20-21 NASB, **emphasis added**). God’s word cannot be clearer here: **“baptism now saves you.”** Who are we to say that it doesn’t? It is a “means of grace.”

The Lord’s Supper

Again, the meaning and importance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as a “means of grace” may not be easily understood. In fact, many confessing Christians and church bodies do not understand the sacraments and the fact that they are a “means” by which God gives us His grace, forgiveness, life and salvation. The majority of non-Lutheran Protestants in our world today view baptism and the Lord’s Supper as mere symbols; helpful “reminders” in our Christian life, and acts by which we show our obedience and faith to God. As we have already noted regarding baptism, the Lord’s Supper is also more than just a “symbol” and a “reminder” of the death of Jesus Christ. It is, in Jesus’ own words a “testament”—a *will*—in which Jesus gives us Himself: His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to

them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28 NIV)

We have already discussed how God gives us His grace through His word and through baptism. Why does He give it to us yet again in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper? Simply put: The Lord's Supper is yet another assurance from God that our sins are forgiven. As one of our pastors once put it, "There is no greater assurance of our forgiveness than the giving of forgiveness."⁵ Pieper writes, "Both Scripture and experience teach that men who feel the weight of their sins find nothing harder to believe than the forgiveness of their sins. Hence the repetition of the assurance of the forgiveness of sins in various ways through the means of grace meets a practical need of Christians."⁶

As a result, this sacrament is yet another "tool" God uses to strengthen our faith in a very powerful, very personal way. "As a means of grace the Lord's Supper has the appointed function of preserving and strengthening our faith in Christ. That strengthening takes place through the power of the Spirit at work in the believing communicant's heart. This strengthening also takes place in direct consequence of having the forgiveness of sins offered and assured in the sacrament . . ."⁷

There are times in most every believer's life where for various reasons we feel very "far away" from God. Whether it's because of personal tragedy, confusion over the unanswered questions of life, or our own guilt over our repeated or particularly troubling sins God's answer for those feelings and doubts is the Lord's Supper. "The business of life is not always good! Cancer is real . . . war is real . . . abuse is real . . . depression is real . . . divorce is real [insert other difficult issue of life or sin here]. God's word may seem Unreal. The Lord's Supper makes the promises of the Word REAL!"⁸

In the Lord's Supper we are able to see, hear, and taste God *personally* assuring us, "No matter what you've been through. No matter what you've done. No matter how you feel. I am here. This is My body and My blood given and shed for You for the forgiveness of Your sins." That is powerful, unmistakable, real grace!

Conclusion

How can we not emphasize these means of grace? As we continue to grow in our *understanding* of and continue to gain a better appreciation for the *importance* of these means by which God gives us His grace and blessings we will emphasize them:

- More frequently and more fully in our preaching,
- More thoroughly and deeply in our Bible classes and teaching,
- More personally and intentionally in our ministering.
- Our faith and the faith of the people we serve will be strengthened and grow.

"We cannot program this growth [in faith]. We can only trust that God will give it to us, as the Bible promises. We cannot demand this or that degree of growth. We can only go to the Scriptures and the Lord's Supper and remember our baptism and there find the assurance of our hope. God will give us the Holy Spirit as he leads us to understand the depth of God's grace."⁹

Endnotes

¹ Andrew Schaller, "Emphasizing the Means of Grace in Our Ministries," (unpublished essay delivered at the West-Central Delegate Conference, 2012) 3

² Michael Sydow, *Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (Eau Claire: CLC Board of Education and Publishing, 2006) 233

3. He here points to Luther's words from the catechism (Third Part of Baptism) and gives the full quotation of Titus 3:4-7, which Luther gives only in part, "But when the kindness and the love God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that have been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

4. A. Andrew Das, *Baptized Into God's Family*, (Milwaukee, Northwestern: 1991) 13-16

5. This quotation is from Pastor David Reim and was quoted in a Youth Conference presentation by the author of this article.

6. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, trans. Walter Albrecht, Theodore Engelder, John T. Mueller (St. Louis, Concordia: 1953) 114

7. Steven Sippert, "The New Covenant of God's Forgiveness in Christ: A Study of God's Forgiveness as it Relates to the Lord's Supper," *Journal of Theology* 52.1 (2012): 42

8. This quotation is from Pastor Paul Nolting and was quoted in a Youth Conference presentation by the author of this article.

9. Robert J. Koester, *Gospel Motivation: More Than "Jesus Died for My Sins,"* (Milwaukee, Northwestern: 2006) 169

Book Review

John Foxe and The Voice of the Martyrs: *Foxe: Voices of the Martyrs*, VOM Books, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Revised Edition 2013, hard cover, 394 pages, 22 preliminary pages.

John Foxe (1516-1587) wrote his *Actes and Monuments* (popularly known as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*) in 1563. His purpose was to inform the people of his day how his fellow Protestants were being persecuted and even executed by officials dominated by the Roman Catholic persuasion, particularly in England and Scotland. Foxe's original book went through many editions, and after his death many additions and abridgments attempting to update and popularize the history of the persecution and martyrdom of Christians through the ages were published.

The organization known as The Voice of the Martyrs had its beginning through the work of Richard Wurmbrand (1909-2001), a Romanian Jew who was converted to Christ together with his wife Sabina in 1938. He became a Lutheran pastor and during the Nazi period of occupation was beaten and arrested. When the Communists of the Soviet Union came to power, Wurmbrand publicly opposed their teachings as well and as a consequence spent two extended periods in prison (1948-1956 and 1959-1964). His wife Sabina was also imprisoned.

After his release from prison the Wurmbrands moved to the United States and in 1967 published his most famous book, *Tortured for Christ*, which made many people aware that the Communists were persecuting and even murdering Christians because of their confession. In the same year, 1967, the Wurmbrands began a ministry known at first as Jesus to the Communist World and later renamed The Voice of the Martyrs. Since that time VOM, as it is known, has greatly expanded its ministry of assistance to persecuted Christians, so that it now has branches in most parts of the world.

In its efforts to publicize the brutal facts of modern-day martyrdom, VOM has updated Foxe's original work and brought it up to the year 2011. The book is divided into three major sections: Martyrs of the First Century, Martyrs from the Second Century to the Twentieth Century, and Modern Martyrs in the Twenty-First Century. The first section concentrates on what we know from the Bible and early Christian historians about the martyrdom of Stephen and the twelve apostles.

The second section, which is by far the largest section, covers many centuries and includes the accounts of such early martyrs as Ignatius, Polycarp, Perpetua, and Cyprian, as well as many lesser known men and women. During the Middle Ages we have the Roman Catholic Church persecuting and executing faithful confessors such as Jan Hus (1370-1415) and his associate, Jerome of Prague. In the sixteenth century, the century of the Reformation, persecution by Roman Catholic authorities continued, ending the life of William Tyndale, whose translation of the English Bible provided the basis for the King James Version of 1611. Particularly in this part of the history we find many Christians put to death for their misguided teachings, such as the Anabaptists who rejected infant baptism, and the Calvinists, who opposed the teaching of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Those responsible for the persecution of these Protestants, of course, were themselves misguided Christians following the guidance of the Roman Catholic pope. Another famous leader who lost his life at this time was Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), the chief author of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*.

As we move on through the centuries, Christians are no longer being persecuted by others who bear the name of Christ, but rather by pagans and Muslims and adherents of other religions. In particular, it was the missionaries sent to non-Christian countries who sacrificed their lives for the gospel of Christ. John and Betty Stam, missionaries in China, lost their lives in 1934. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) lost his life to the Nazi regime in Germany. Jim Elliot and four other missionaries to the Auca Indians in Ecuador were speared to death in 1956 by some they came to save; their story became well-known through the account, *Through Gates of Splendor*, written by Jim's widow, Elisabeth Elliot, a well-known writer who herself later helped to evangelize the very Indians who killed her husband.

The last section of the book is devoted to the accounts of Christians who have lost their lives in our present century. For the most part their names are unfamiliar to us. Most of these martyrs are being put to death simply because they want to continue in the Christian faith in spite of severe persecution and torture. These martyrdoms are taking place in many places in the world, including India, China, Nigeria, Pakistan, Myanmar, the Philippines, Colombia, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mexico, Afghanistan, Egypt, Sudan, Iran, Laos, Turkey, Vietnam, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, and Somalia. In most of these countries it is the radical Muslims who are taking the lead in this continued persecution, torture, and murder of Christians, all in the name of the Allah of Mohammed.

The very last martyr to be mentioned is Mario Acidre, a pastor in the Philippines, who died on August 27, 2011. The account begins: "The gunman pointed the pistol at Pastor Mario Acidre and shot him six to eight times. . . . The gunman fled, leaving his victim for dead, but Mario, bleeding profusely, managed to stagger into his bedroom where his wife was" (p. 389). He was rushed to the hospital for surgery, but "though the operation was successful, Mario's kidneys failed in the meantime; he subsequently died" (p. 389).

The account continues: "Mario Acidre put his life on the line every day in order to bring the truth of God's Word to his fellow Filipinos. A former Muslim himself, he was driven by the love of Christ to share the Good News with his Muslim relatives and neighbors, which he did regularly. . . . Knowing the risk, he told Jum (his wife) on several occasions, 'We must always be ready to face death for the work of the Lord.' . . . Months after his death, Jum Acidre continued in church ministry in an effort to reach out to her nonbelieving relatives" (p. 390).

Church history has proved that persecution and murder have not succeeded in silencing the voice of the Holy Spirit. In fact, God has used persecution and martyrdom to bring about the spread of Christ's gospel. We need to pray that Christians all over the world will remain faithful to Christ in their testimony and in their lives, regardless of the consequences. We need to pray especially for our brothers and sisters in Christ in such countries as Myanmar, Nepal, India, and Nigeria that they will remain faithful in their confession in times of danger and threats of death. And since it is very possible that we also may face serious threats to our Christian faith here in America in the near future, we ask our God to keep us faithful when our time comes, so that Christ's name may be glorified by our lives, by our testimony, and, if God wills, by our martyrdom.

David Lau