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### **From the Book of Nehemiah**

David Lau  
(Conclusion)

#### **Sermon #9 on Nehemiah 9: 26-27**

**"Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them; and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies."**

After Nehemiah and the Jews finished the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, they concentrated on the restoration of the true worship of God according to His law. In carrying out this restoration of true worship Nehemiah and Ezra set aside one whole day for fasting and confession of sins. On that day a number of the Levites presented a summary of Israelite history, going all the way back to Genesis One and reaching forward to their own time.

Our text for today is taken from this historical summary. It speaks about a time in Israelite history when God let enemies oppress His people. Yes, the Israelites at that particular time of their history were invaded by their enemies, defeated by their enemies, dominated by their enemies, and it seemed as though they had no God at all or that their God was powerless.

Does this ever happen today? It certainly does. We think of how small bands of Christians in Communist countries like China or Russia have been persecuted and oppressed for many, many years. Or we can think of how whole nations that are at least nominally Christian are taken over by drug lords and criminal elements. The same thing seems to be happening in some of the larger cities of our own country, with the result that many of God's people are being victimized and oppressed. And does it not seem sometimes as though those favoring abortion in our land are winning the battle against the pro-life forces? And what shall we say when we hear of once-loyal Lutheran synods being taken over by gay activists, as they call themselves? It is hard to believe, I know, but I have a reliable report that says that the opening communion service of a

Lutheran synod in California featured singing by the San Francisco Gay/Lesbian Chorus. God's people still remaining in that synod are being persecuted and oppressed by the majority. And I do not have any doubts at all that sometimes in our own midst those who want to do the right Christian thing in a certain situation are sometimes overwhelmed and outvoted by those who are determined to do evil. Why does God let these things happen? Why does God let the good guys lose and the bad guys win? Our text for today should help us consider what is going on WHEN GOD LETS ENEMIES OPPRESS HIS PEOPLE.

The first point that our text makes is that **SOMETIMES GOD SENDS TROUBLE BECAUSE OF OUR DISOBEDIENCE**. Our text is talking about the history of Israel after the death of Joshua. The book of Judges says: **"When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they followed other gods, ... and they provoked the Lord to anger"** (Judg. 2:10-12).

The Levites therefore speak of this disobedience in their historical summary. They say of their fathers at that time in their history: **"Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, cast Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets, who testified against them to turn them to Yourself; and they worked great provocations. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them."**

This is the way it has often been in history. God's once-loyal people turn away from Him, first little by little, then by bigger steps, until finally it can be said they are following other gods. Because God still cares about His people, He then intervenes by delivering His people into the hands of their enemies, so that they begin to realize what has been going on in their midst, how they have begun to turn away from God to worship idols.

Such things happen in the New Testament times too. We think of what the apostle Paul said to the Christians in Corinth in connection with their misuse of the Lord's Supper. He said they were not judging themselves or finding fault with themselves; therefore God was sending a judgment among them. What was the judgment? Paul says: **"Many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep"** (1 Cor. 11:30). God was sending sickness and weakness and even death to them to make them become aware of their sins, all of this for a loving purpose, as he says: **"When we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world"** (1 Cor. 11:32). When God no longer bothers to send trouble because of our disobedience, then we really are in a bad way, for that means He has given us up to our own follies without trying to correct us.

But we have to be careful that we do not make rash judgments about all the trouble God sends. Sometimes God sends trouble because of our disobedience. Sometimes God sends trouble for other reasons, as, for example, when He sent trouble into Job's life. We cannot always match the trouble we are in to a specific disobedience on our part; nevertheless the thesis stands: sometimes God sends trouble because of our disobedience.

And **SOMETIMES THE TROUBLE WE ARE IN LEADS US TO CRY TO GOD FOR HELP**. This is what happened to the Israelites in the days after Joshua's death. The Levites say to God: **"You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who oppressed them, and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven"** (Neh. 9:27).

You see, the troubles they were in led them to cry out to God in prayer. If their prosperity had continued, they would not have thought of prayer. We Christians, sinful as we still are, simply cannot stand prosperity for any length of time. We get smug and self-satisfied and begin to think we are worthy of the blessings we are receiving. And we begin to sin more and more with the thought that God really does not mind our sinning; after all, the blessings are continuing. So the troubles God sends us are among His methods to lead us to repentance and heartfelt prayer to our God for His help and deliverance.

The children of Israel in their bondage in Egypt cried out to God, and He sent them Moses to deliver them. After Joshua's death God sent enemies to oppress His disobedient people, and they cried out to God in their distress, and he sent them men like Gideon and Jephthah and Samson to deliver them. If we now in our country or situation begin to see oppression of God's people by their enemies, or we see the government being dominated by criminal elements, or we see synods and churches taken over by godless teachers, or we see the forces of evil triumphing in one way or another over that which is good and right, we know what to do, do we not? We need to cry out to God for help first of all. There may be other things we can do also, but there is this one thing we can surely do: in the time of our trouble we can cry out to our God. Whether we are young or old, men or women, rich or poor, this is something we can all do as Christians. We can cry out to God in the name of Jesus, God's Son, our Savior. As it is written: **"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need"** (Heb. 4:16).

But again we can only say: Sometimes the trouble we are in leads us to cry to God for help. The Bible records other times when God sent trouble, and it had little or no effect. Hear these words of the prophet Amos: **"I gave you lack of bread, yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord. I also withheld rain from you, yet you have not returned to Me. I blasted you with blight and mildew; yet you have not returned to Me. I sent among you a plague; yet you have**

**not returned to Me. I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah; yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord. Therefore prepare to meet your God, O Israel"** (Amos 4:6-12). When trouble does not induce us to cry to God for help, all that remains is the final judgment. Oh, how we need to pray to our God in our day when there are so many enemies and evils oppressing us!

And then when we pray to our God, there is one thing we can be sure of: OUR MERCIFUL GOD ALWAYS WANTS TO HELP HIS OPPRESSED PEOPLE. Here we do not say sometimes, but always, for it is written: **"God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all"** (1 Tim. 2:4-6).

Since God wants all people to be saved, and since Jesus did indeed die on the cross as a ransom for all people, we can say with absolute assurance that our merciful God always wants to help us. Therefore the Levites say in our text: **"When they cried to You, You heard from heaven, and according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies."** When God sends trouble to His people, He always has something good in mind. We can be sure of this because of God's ultimate desire for all people. He does not want to hurt anyone or punish anyone. That is why He sent Jesus, His Son, into the world to be punished in our place. Would He do that if He wanted to hurt us? He always wants to help, and He always does help those who cry out to Him. For He has said to us: **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."** **"We may boldly say: 'The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"** (Heb. 13:5-6).

In His abundant mercies God delivered His crying children from their bondage in Egypt. In His abundant mercies God delivered His crying people in the days after Joshua by sending them deliverers or judges to save them. So also in His abundant mercies God sent His Son to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil. And He will deliver us in His mercies from all the evil consequences of sin in our lives. But this He does according to the pattern of good that He has designed which we cannot always understand now, but will understand perfectly when we find ourselves eternally with our Lord and God in heaven, having been delivered from the hand of all our enemies forever. O Lord, **"deliver us from evil."** Amen!

#### Sermon #10 on Nehemiah 9: 36-38

**"Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its bounty, here we are, servants in it! And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, because of our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle at their pleasure; and we are in great distress. And because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it."**

The tenth chapter of Nehemiah begins with a list of names, and the first name on this list is Nehemiah himself. The persons on this list were leaders of the Jews, and they all placed their seal on a certain document in which they promised to be faithful to the Lord.

In our church body today we also have lists of names. We have a constitution in our congregation, and we have a list of names of persons who have signed this constitution. We also have lists of confirmed or communicant members, and all of these persons have declared their agreement with our confession and have promised to be faithful to the Lord. We expect all of our members to be able and willing to say: "I intend, by the grace of God, to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death."

This morning we want to consider OUR PROMISE TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE LORD in the light of this text from Nehemiah that speaks of a covenant that Nehemiah and the Jews made with the Lord and how they placed their seal on this document.

Notice, first of all, that OUR PROMISE to be faithful to the Lord PRESUPPOSES A KNOWLEDGE OF OUR SIN AND GOD'S GRACE. The Levites say to God: **"Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its good things, here we are, servants in it! And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, because of our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress."**

The Jews were back in their homeland in and around Jerusalem. The temple worship had been restored. The walls of the city had been rebuilt. These were all wonderful blessings, but at the same time their condition was not at all as it had been in the glory days of David and Solomon. They were in great distress, because they were now servants or slaves of the Persian king. Even though they were living in the land God gave to their fathers, they were servants to the Persian king. They were in great distress because of their lack of freedom and independence, which they had once enjoyed as the specially blessed children of God.

Why were they now servants instead of free men? They are honest enough to give the right answer: **"because of**

**our sins."** They could not complain that God had been unfair to them. They say to God in their prayer: **"You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly"** (Neh. 9:33).

But at the same time that they recognized their sins against God, they also recognized God's great mercy and kindness. After all, they were now living in the Promised Land under God's blessing. They had to admit God's abundant kindness to them in spite of their many sins. For they say to God: **"In Your great mercy You did not utterly consume our fathers nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful"** (Neh. 9:31). Yes, God in His grace and mercy had forgiven them all their sins on the basis of the work of the coming Savior whom He had promised to send to them.

Their promise to be faithful to the Lord must be understood in the light of the recognition of their own sins and their experience of God's gracious forgiveness. So also today when we promise to be faithful to the Lord at our confirmation or through our becoming members of this congregation, this promise can be understood only by the fact that we are sinners who have experienced God's forgiving grace. Certainly we dare not make our promise to be faithful to the Lord in a bargaining spirit of self-righteousness. We should never think: I'm promising to be faithful to the Lord, and if I keep this promise, God will be good to me. I am going to save myself through my keeping of this promise, so that God will be obligated to reward me and I will deserve His blessings.

It simply does not work that way because of who we are and what God has done for us. We do want to be faithful to the Lord, but not in order to save ourselves or to earn something from God. God has already saved us. He has forgiven us our sins. We are God's forgiven ones, at the same time saints and sinners, and we promise to serve Him because He has first served us by rescuing us from our sins through Jesus Christ.

But keeping all this in mind, what are we now promising? What does it mean to be faithful to the Lord? THIS PROMISE to be faithful to the Lord INVOLVES A DESIRE TO DO THE LORD'S WILL IN ALL THINGS. The Levites and other leaders said to God after the historical review of their sin and God's grace: **"Because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; and our leaders and our Levites and our priests seal it."**

The tenth chapter of Nehemiah indicates what they now promised to do. They **"entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God, and His ordinances and His statutes"** (Neh. 10:29). Do you see what they promised? To do the Lord's will in all things; to walk in God's law. They promised this with an oath, making it a very serious matter indeed. They voluntarily placed themselves under a curse if they disobeyed God's law with all its commandments. They did not exclude any of God's requirements but included them all. They indicated their willingness to do whatever God said.

There were several items in God's law which at that time and in those circumstances they were particularly tempted to ignore or disobey. These they spelled out in greater detail in their promise. They said they would not intermarry with the heathen. They would not buy and sell on the Sabbath. They would let the land rest in the seventh year. They would forgive debts according to God's law. They would celebrate the prescribed festivals. They would support the priests and Levites with their offerings. They would pay the required tithes. They would not neglect the house of their God. This was all part of their solemn promise, and they sealed the document. Truly they had a desire to do the Lord's will in all things.

What about our promise to be faithful to the Lord? Are we as serious and solemn as they were? Do we really desire to do the Lord's will in all things, or are we keeping back certain segments of our lives from Him, so that He cannot interfere with our fun? What are the particular temptations of our times, which we can spell out in our promises to the Lord?

Our traditional confirmation promise includes an agreement that we regard all the books of the Bible to be the inspired word of God. Many are the so-called Christian groups today that have abandoned this confession of the Bible's inspiration. It is a temptation for us to do the same as they and quit being so strict about this teaching. But how then can we be faithful to our Lord if we are willing to give up certain portions of His word? Jesus said: **"If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed"** (John 8:31). Jesus said: **"The Scriptures cannot be broken"** (John 10:35). And again it is written: **"All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God"** (2 Tim. 3:16), that is, breathed out by God.

Our members are expected to agree with the provisions of our church constitution that they may not be members of any organization that conflicts with the word of God or any organization that requires a uniting in religious activities with persons who follow a false confession. Our congregation is one of the few churches that still holds to such a principle in this age of ours when everybody wants to be tolerant of false religion and ungodliness. Are we going beyond the will of God when we ask people to make such a promise? Not at all. For just as God in the Old Testament forbade intermarriage with the heathen, so He also commands us today to refrain from participation in any kind of false worship or support of false teaching. He tells us to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned from Him. A faithful Christian will surely want to follow the Lord's will in all things, and that includes His instructions to steer clear of false teaching.

OUR PROMISE to be faithful to the Lord in all of these ways IS A PROPER RESPONSE TO OUR LORD'S FAITHFULNESS. The Jews under Nehemiah responded to the Lord's grace and mercy in their history by promising to obey the Lord in all things. In view of what our God has done for us, in sending us Jesus as our Savior to wipe away our sins and

in giving us His precious gospel to assure us of God's forgiveness, what is more fitting than that we also promise to be faithful to our God? Such faithfulness is implied already in our baptism, through which our God has called us to Himself and brought us the blessings of Christ's death and resurrection. In baptism **"our old nature was crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin"** but rather "slaves of God, slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:6.18), willing to serve our God with all our talents, all the members of our body, with everything we have. For it is written: **"You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body"** (1 Cor. 6:20). And again it is written: **"Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God"** (Rom. 6:13). Our Lord has saved us from sin, death, and the devil so that we might serve Him without fear all the days of our lives. We love Him because He first loved us. We devote ourselves to Him because He first devoted Himself to us. We serve Him because He came to serve us first and to give His life as our ransom.

What else can we say in response to our Lord's faithfulness other than the words of the Israelites in the days of Joshua: **"The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey"** (Josh. 24:24). Amen!

### Sermon #11 on Nehemiah 12: 27, 43

**Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. ...**

**Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.**

In the last few months we have been following the progress of Nehemiah and the Jews in their great rebuilding project. The walls were rebuilt in only 52 days, and then efforts were made to restore the temple worship in accordance with the law of God. A special day of fasting and confession was set, during which the leaders of the Jews solemnly swore to obey all the commandments of the Lord. They rejoiced in the mercy of their God, who had forgiven their many sins in the past and was still blessing them in the present in spite of their continuing sins.

Today we consider the next great celebration in the lives of Nehemiah and the Jews in and around Jerusalem: namely, the day on which the wall of Jerusalem was dedicated to the glory of their God. DEDICATION DAY IN JERUSALEM -- what a great day that was! We at Messiah congregation should be especially interested in this dedication day in Jerusalem, because we ourselves in the near future will be celebrating our Dedication Day, that is, the day on which we will be dedicating our new addition with all its rooms and features to the service and glory of the one true God.

Our text from Nehemiah chapter 12 tells us that their dedication day in Jerusalem was A DAY OF THANKSGIVING, A DAY OF MUSIC, A DAY OF SACRIFICES, and A DAY OF JOY. Let us consider these things one by one on this Thanksgiving Eve.

DEDICATION DAY IN JERUSALEM was A DAY OF THANKSGIVING. Our text says: **"Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps."**

It was not only the people inside the city limits of Jerusalem that were invited to the celebration, but also the people in the villages round about. Jerusalem was their city also, and the temple in Jerusalem was their place of worship. They all had reason to give thanksgiving to the Lord on this day. The two choirs that were appointed to provide the music on this day were called **"thanksgiving choirs."** That was their chief function, to lead the people in their giving of thanks to the Lord.

Yes, thanksgiving is and ought to be always thanksgiving to the Lord. So often thanksgiving celebrations in our time are merely family festivals in which we rejoice in each other's company and enjoy good food together. We need always to remember whom we are thanking on this day, and whom we ought to be thanking every day for the blessings we receive. "Now thank we all our God." Yes, the Lord our God is the one we thank, just as the Lord their God was the One thanked by the Jews in Jerusalem, for our text says: **"They rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy."**

It was the Lord in His mercy who had permitted their fathers to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. It was the Lord in His mercy who had blessed Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the walls of the city. It was the Lord in His mercy who had forgiven their many sins, who had fended off their enemies, who had provided for their earthly needs, and who was now permitting them to enjoy this Dedication Day.

It is no different for us today. We are unworthy of any blessings from the Lord because of our sins. This is a true statement. We are unworthy. In fact the least sin on our part makes us unworthy of any blessing from our God and calls down God's judgment on our heads. Since we are unworthy of any blessings from our God, it is clear that we should thank

the Lord, not ourselves, for any blessings we enjoy on this day. Do you have a roof over your head? Thank the Lord. Do you have enough to eat and drink on this day? Thank the Lord. Do you have a family or friends that love you and help you? Thank the Lord. Do you have a country that you can call your own? Do you enjoy liberty and protection in this your country? Thank the Lord. Do you have a church that provides you with God's word, both law and gospel, to show you your sins and to show you your Savior? Thank the Lord. Do you have a Savior from sin, do you enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, do you have a Bible, do you have the hope of eternal life in a new Jerusalem? Thank the Lord. Thank the Lord for all these earthly and spiritual blessings of which we are unworthy. We pray that our Dedication Day will be A DAY OF THANKSGIVING also, even as every day of our lives ought to be a day of thanksgiving. As it is written: **"We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come"** (Rev. 11:17).

But their DEDICATION DAY IN JERUSALEM was not only a day of thanksgiving. It was A DAY OF MUSIC. We hear of **"singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps."** We hear of **"two large thanksgiving choirs."** We hear of two processions around the walls of the city, one led by Ezra, the other by Nehemiah. We hear of how these two processions met in the house of God, where there were priests with trumpets. We hear of a choir director by the name of Jezrahiah. Nehemiah wrote: **"The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah as their director."**

Singing and musical instruments are gifts from God. How sad it is that so much so-called music in our day is devoted to the glorification of evil and to the stirring up of the lusts of the flesh and the angry emotions of violence! Rather let us sing and play for the Lord! What a great blessing it is that the children in our school are learning to sing the praises of our Lord and God! What a blessing it is that our congregation has organists, choir directors, instrumentalists, and singers who are willing to use their talents for the praise of God. And let us all not be ashamed to sing our congregational hymns loudly, with true sincerity and devotion. We are praising the Lord. Let us join in singing this music, with our hearts if we do not have the voices, as it is written: **"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name!"** (Ps. 103:1).

DEDICATION DAY IN JERUSALEM was also A DAY OF SACRIFICES. Our text says: **"Also that day they offered great sacrifices."** Most likely animal sacrifices are referred to, together with the sacrifices of other things grown in their fields. The Bible tells us that when King Solomon dedicated the original temple in Jerusalem, he offered 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep. Imagine the money value of such sacrifices. No doubt the Jews in Nehemiah's time could not match the dollar value of Solomon's sacrifice. They were not as wealthy as he. Nevertheless, the sacrifices given on that day are described by the Bible as **"great sacrifices,"** and surely they were pleasing to the Lord because they were offered in a humble spirit of gratitude to God for His great blessings.

The work of the Lord in our congregation today demands continuing great sacrifices. We have set high goals for ourselves in operating our various church programs, our Messiah School, our Immanuel High School, College, and Seminary. Much of our present building project has been paid for by one widow, who remembered our congregation in her will. But the offerings need to keep coming in, if we are going to maintain what we have and expand our program, as God gives us opportunities.

The Jews in Nehemiah's day realized the needs of God's house. They solemnly swore before God: **"We will not neglect the house of our God"** (Neh. 10:39). They promised to provide for the priests and Levites and the work of the temple. Oh, that all of us may be filled with such love for the Lord and such devotion to His work that we will bring great sacrifices and offerings on our Dedication Day, as well as in all the weeks and months to come. Right now we are over \$5,000 short in our Budgetary Fund. It is hard for us even to dream of being able to carry out any expansion of our program, when we are so far behind. And yet there is more work to be done, there are children to teach, there are people to reach, there are souls to be saved, God has given us opportunities. May He now also give us willing hearts to use a sizable portion of what He has given us for His great work. Then it will become evident that we are not only dedicating a building for God's service, but that we are dedicating ourselves and what we have for His work.

But at all times we want to remember the apostle's word: **"God loves a cheerful giver"** (2 Cor. 9:7). DEDICATION DAY IN JERUSALEM was A DAY OF JOY. This is the spirit we strive for and pray for in our midst also, for we have so much to be joyful about. Our text says: **"That day they rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off."**

Our celebrations of God's blessings here on this earth are the days of the greatest joy we can enjoy in this life. When we rejoice in God's love for us sinners, as revealed in Jesus Christ, when we rejoice in God's merciful gifts to us, when we rejoice in the fruits of the field given us by our God, when we rejoice in the spiritual blessings provided for us in home and church and school, this is real joy that has permanence, not the temporary pleasures provided by drugs or illicit sex or gambling, that eventually lead to our ruin.

The joy of God's people in their God's love and mercy is lasting joy, because God is unchangeable and His love is steadfast. The only greater joy than the joy of a Christian celebration of God's blessings is the joy we will enjoy in the heavenly Jerusalem to which all our earthly dedication days and religious holidays point. Yes, because of the great blessing

of our Savior Jesus Christ and the forgiveness He won for us by His death and resurrection we look forward to the joy described in Revelation 21. There in the new Jerusalem we shall see better walls and better gates than Nehemiah built. We shall see truly amazing constructions far surpassing even the glories of Solomon's temple. We shall see the holy city and above all we shall see Christ, our Savior, and we shall live with Him and His people forever. Amen!

### Sermon #12 on Nehemiah 13: 14, 22b, 31b

**Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services! ...**

**Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy! ...**

**Remember me, O my God, for good!**

On this last Sunday of the church year we think of the last day of the world, when we shall all stand before the judgment seat of the almighty God. There are only two possibilities on that day. Either we shall be rejected and cast off as workers of iniquity who never knew the Lord, or we shall be remembered by the Lord as being His people, having trusted in His mercy and having served Him in our lives on earth.

In view of this great judgment day that is most certainly coming and is most certainly closer at hand today than it was yesterday, it is fitting that we pray together with the hymn-writer: "With Thy favored sheep, oh, place me, nor among the goats abase me!" "Spare, O God, in mercy spare me!" (The Lutheran Hymnal, 607:15.19).

Our texts for today from the last chapter of Nehemiah are three prayers that Nehemiah prayed to his God as he finished writing his book by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Nehemiah was also thinking of the great judgment day as he prayed these three prayers at the end of a long life in which he had served his Lord and God. Three times he prays: **"REMEMBER ME! REMEMBER ME! REMEMBER ME!"** Interestingly, the thief on the cross next to Jesus used these very same words in addressing the King crucified at his side. **"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"** (Luke 23:42). Is this not our prayer also as we think of the coming day when we shall stand before the Lord? "Dear Lord, remember me."

What were the circumstances under which Nehemiah prayed this prayer three times? It is one of the most depressing scenes in the whole Bible. Do you remember how the Jewish people under Nehemiah had solemnly sworn to obey all the laws that God had given them through Moses? Yes, it is written that **"they entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law."** Specifically, they promised never again to intermarry with the heathen, never again to work on the Sabbath, never again to neglect the support of the priests and the Levites and temple worship of their God. No doubt they were sincere when they made these promises. No doubt their hearts were filled with joy and thanksgiving for what God had done for them. They were truly sorry for their past sins and they appreciated the abundant forgiveness of their gracious God. No doubt they fully intended to keep their promises and obey God's law.

But consider what happened. After twelve years their governor Nehemiah returned to the Persian king Artaxerxes, whom he served as cupbearer. After Nehemiah left them, the Jews quickly returned to their old ways. They stopped supporting the priests and Levites with their offerings, and some of them had to go into farming to support themselves, and therefore the worship of God was neglected. In fact, the storehouse in the temple for offerings to the Lord was turned into a home for Tobiah, the Ammonite, a well-known enemy of the Jews, who was now related by marriage to the high priest. Many of the Jews had become married to the heathen; in fact many of the children did not understand the Hebrew language anymore but were being brought up in the language of the heathen. And the Sabbath was no longer a day of rest and worship, but it had become a day for buying and selling, a day for work and profit.

How discouraging and depressing it must have been for Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem from the Persian king and see how the religious conditions of his people had deteriorated so quickly during his absence! Immediately Nehemiah took action to correct the situation. He still had authority from the Persian king as governor of this people, and he was determined to use his authority to reform his people once again. This is what his record says: **"I discovered the evil that the high priest had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms. ... I contended with the rulers, and said, 'Why is the house of God forsaken?' And I gathered them together and set them in their place"** (Neh. 13:7-11). Nehemiah's zeal in cleansing the temple reminds us of the zeal of our Lord Jesus when he drove the money-changers and animals out of the temple with a whip.

But Nehemiah was not finished with them. When he saw them working on the Sabbath, this is what he did according to his report. **"I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, 'What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?' ... So I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened**

**till after the Sabbath"** (Neh. 13:17-19).

Nehemiah also took action concerning the problem of intermarriage. His record says: **"I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God saying, 'You shall not give your daughter as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. ... Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?'"** (Neh. 13:25-27).

We can sense Nehemiah's discouragement and frustration with his people. How could they commit such sins in such a short time after they promised and swore loyalty and obedience to their God? Since he was the governor, the temporal authority under the Persian king and under God, he took forcible action to correct the problems. It seems that the prophet Malachi was also active during this time, not only working to bring about repentance among the people but also to assure the repentant among them that the Savior was still coming as long promised. And this is the way the Old Testament ends. There was no more Spirit-inspired leader after Nehemiah, and no more Spirit-inspired prophet after Malachi.

But Nehemiah knew that a time was coming when God would be his Judge. How would he fare on that day? Did he condemn his people for their sins and consider himself above reproach? Did he expect to stand before his Judge on the basis of a perfect life? No, listen to his prayer: **"Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy."**

You see, Nehemiah knew that he also needed God's mercy. He also was a sinner. We can be sure that Nehemiah did not react to the sins of Jerusalem with a perfect and pure heart. He probably felt something like Moses when Moses reacted to the continued sins of his people by saying: **"Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"** (Num. 20:10). Moses failed to glorify God at that time, and Nehemiah no doubt failed in the same way.

Therefore it is good that Nehemiah asked God to spare him in His mercy. The fact is that no one can stand before God without fault. David once wrote: **"Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous"** (Ps. 143:2). For this reason it was fitting that Nehemiah also should pray: **"Spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy,"** even though he was not guilty of all the sins of his people. Yet he was a sinner, as are we all, no matter what office we hold in the church, and no matter how conscientiously we have striven to carry out our appointed duties. We are all failures in one way or the other, and we need the same mercy that Nehemiah needed. We need to pray: SPARE ME IN YOUR MERCY, O GOD.

God's answer to this prayer is Jesus Christ. God's answer to this prayer is this: I forgive you all your sins for the sake of Jesus, My Son, whom I did not spare on the cross, but punished Him for all your sins, and for His sake I forgive you.

Nehemiah wanted God to spare him in His mercy. He was also concerned that the good he had done in his life would not be forgotten. **"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!"** Nehemiah's faith in his God was an active faith. In fact, true faith is always active. For **"faith without works is dead"** (Jas. 2:20). As a believer in God's mercy and as a servant of the Lord, Nehemiah accomplished great things in his religious reforms. He did what he could to make God's law the law of the land.

We are living in the New Testament. We need not be concerned with enforcing Old Testament provisions such as the tithe or the Sabbath or the prohibition of intermarriage with the heathen. These specific regulations are not repeated in the New Testament, and they do not apply to us now. Yet faith remains active in good works, works done in love, works such as honoring our parents, loving our spouses, obeying the authorities over us, respecting God's word, being good neighbors in every possible way, spreading and supporting the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do we want God to remember the good works that we have done in faith and love? Nehemiah did, and so can we. We can pray: **"DO NOT WIPE OUT MY GOOD DEEDS that I have done."** And what is God's answer? This is His answer, as recorded in the letter to the Hebrews: **"God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints"** (Heb. 6:10). Our good deeds will not be forgotten. Our sins will be remembered no more, but Jesus will publicize our good deeds on the last day to prove to all that our faith in Him was not dead. Not that we put our trust in these good works that remain tainted with sin! Jesus is our Savior, and He alone is our Savior. Yet He in His mercy will not forget the good fruit we bring forth as branches on the Vine.

Nehemiah's last prayer closes his book. **"Remember me, O my God, for good!"** Nehemiah wanted a blessed end. Nehemiah wanted to be taken from this vale of tears and disappointments and frustrations to be with the Lord in heaven. This is the only ultimate good there is!

REMEMBER ME FOR GOOD. The thief on the cross prayed a similar prayer to his Savior and King. What was the answer to this prayer? Nothing but good! For Jesus said: **"Today you will be with Me in Paradise"** (Luke 23:43). This is being remembered -- for good.

So let us pray with Nehemiah, with the thief on the cross, and with the hymn-writer: "When in the solemn hour of death I wait Thy just decree, Be this the prayer of my last breath: Dear Lord, remember me. And when before Thy throne I



stand and lift my soul to Thee, then with the saints at Thy right hand, dear Lord, remember me!" (The Lutheran Hymnal, 515:5-6). Amen!

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## **CONCORD HAS ITS FORMULA**

R. E. Schaller

### **Introduction**

Those were days of warfare, danger and persecution. They were days when a man of God might easily be expelled or imprisoned because he would not bow to the Augsburg Interim. Then perhaps a friendly Lutheran nobleman would hear of his plight and extend him a call to one of the large churches in his domain. Everything might look good for a year or two and then he finds he must stand up for the truth against false statements on Justification or Original Sin, and must oppose one of the ruler's favorites. Ousted again, he wanders elsewhere in great need, but there's no help for it. He can't help but stand up for the truth.

This may continue for twenty or thirty years until finally he settles somewhere in peace, only to die a few days or weeks later. At one time during those days about four hundred pastors were deposed or imprisoned, some even put to death, because they would not give up their Lutheran beliefs. Only God could and did send them relief. True, the Lord always sent it at the right time but until then there was always the argument in regard to teachings and practices which, coupled with all the physical fighting and warfare, could alter the entire position and station of the man.

Into this situation the Lord sent some extremely brilliant men, men of education and learning, men who at times gained their degrees at very youthful ages. They were men who stood up against error while others fabricated it. They were men who stood firm against the enemy while others tried to compromise with the enemy in order to gain their ends. Such were the men sent to serve in those days of much intrigue when many pastors and teachers wandered through Germany and other lands trying to find a place of peace.

Within our Lutheran Church there were many who saw that if there ever was to be earthly "Concord" or "Peace," it could not come about at the cost of their peace with God. That peace must always stand. The fellowship that they had with God the Father in Jesus Christ His Son was of the utmost importance to them and was found only in the Word of Truth, in Christ. Therefore no matter what they tried to do, nor how often they found themselves in grave trouble, they believed that any formula that would finally produce concord and peace in Germany must rest in the Word of Truth alone. This would be true when Political Lutheranism fell, it would be true when God chose men to champion His cause and bring about His concord, and it would be true as they watched His strength develop the Formula for them.

### **The Political Fall**

In 1530, when the Augsburg Confession had been presented and signed by the Lutheran noblemen, the royalty of Germany well knew that Charles V would at some time -- as soon as possible -- return to their land and attempt to crush the 'Lutheran Heresy.' They knew the importance of their stand and the effect that it had produced on the Emperor the day it was presented. They proceeded to gather support, formidable support, forming an alliance known as the Smalkald League. As the Reformation and Lutheranism spread through additional parts of Germany, independent cities were added to their league. With this they gained political power and solidarity. Charles V would have to think twice, would have to make some preparations if he wanted his attack to be successful. For the next twenty-five years he did not return, being too busy with Francis I of France and the Turks. Even the Pope hindered him, no doubt unintentionally, in his planned advance on the Lutheran "heretics." It appeared that God was answering Luther's prayer and the Pope or Emperor would not strike a blow during his life-time.

However in the year of Luther's death, 1546, this picture changed. In that summer at the Diet of Regensburg the Emperor made what amounted to a declaration of war on the Lutherans and the Smalkald League. Everything seemed to turn sour for the Lutheran noblemen. Philip's bigamous marriage had given the Emperor his chance for "righteous vengeance," since it was against the law of the Empire. But worst of all, Moritz, Duke of Saxony, had his eye on the Electorate of Saxony and defected to become the "Judas of Meissen." At the same time many of the other rulers became 'neutral' to save themselves, when the victory might still have been theirs. Their forces were truly formidable. The Elector John Frederick of Saxony was left shorn of power with Moritz attacking from the rear unexpectedly and invading Saxony, causing other princes to disperse. The Elector was forced to hurry home to defend his threatened electorate.

Charles was left to parade triumphantly through Swabia, reestablishing monasteries and convents as he went. He then proceeded to Saxony to aid Moritz in the final victory. The decisive battle took place at Mühlberg on the Elbe River,

on April 24, 1547. In the fog of a Sunday morning Charles attacked the flank of John Frederick's army and surprised him. The Elector fled toward Wittenberg, but was captured about fifteen miles north of Mühlberg. The emperor had taken part in the campaign with one foot out of the stirrup because he had the gout so badly. Wittenberg was defended by five thousand troops but gave up without a fight for the sake of the Elector. Phillip of Hesse was captured by means of deception without a fight. The entire political strength of the Lutheran lands was dissipated in a very short and decisive campaign which was almost laughable. The Lord was not using the might of the sword for His Reformation: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. 4, 6c).

### **The Augsburg Interim**

The Augsburg Interim was the first move of the emperor with which he intended to step beyond the Pope and the Council and solve the "Lutheran Problem." It was called "Interim" because it was intended to remain in force until a decision could be made by the Council of Trent, already in session. That Council had been the second move of the emperor before his entrance into Germany. He had asked, almost demanded, the meeting in order to reform Roman Catholic teaching, something which it never did accomplish.

This "Interim" plan made certain concessions to the Lutherans but imposed certain "old forms" on them. The Protestant clergy were still permitted to marry and the communicants were allowed both kinds in the Lord's Supper but the "old forms" were Roman customs such as Corpus Christi festivals, etc. Worse still, the plan included the recognition of the Pope as supreme (*iure divino*), and the papal bishops again had jurisdiction in each area. Worst of all, all dogma had to be taught in the Roman Catholic sense, including transubstantiation and the seven sacraments. Lutheran doctrines, such as justification by faith alone, were either denied or omitted. *Sola Fide* itself was completely omitted and justification included renewal, as the Roman Catholic doctrine was wont to do. This interim was renounced by almost everyone, even Melancthon, at first. The document itself had been produced by a Catholic Bishop and Michael Helding, plus John Agricola, a court preacher of Elector Joachim of Brandenburg, whom Luther had found to be unacceptable since 1540. The latter now claimed with this document he had reformed the pope and made the Emperor Lutheran, a hoax which fooled no one.

### **The Leipzig Interim**

We noted that Melancthon was very critical of the Augsburg Interim at first, especially in private correspondence. As time went on, however, his opinion seems to have changed. And when the Augsburg Interim did not work because of the uproar it caused and the attacks made upon it, not to mention the impossibility of enforcing it except in those areas where the emperor's troops had complete control, Moritz of Saxony called on Melancthon, Julius Pflug, and George of Anhalt to work out a new compromise, called the "Leipzig Interim." This is where the weakness and the compromising attitude of Melancthon came out into the open.

It should be stated here that Martin Luther had already noticed the weakness of his friends at Wittenberg and in some other places. He feared that the whole faculty at Wittenberg would be tripped up by the designs of Satan. Near the time of his death Luther had posted a sign above the door of his study: "Our professors are to be examined on the Lord's Supper." When Major, who was about to leave for the colloquy at Regensburg, entered and inquired what these words signified, Luther answered: "The meaning of these words is precisely what you read and what they say; and when you and I shall have returned, an examination will have to be held, to which you as well as others will be cited."

Major protested that he was not addicted to any false doctrine. Luther answered: "It is by your silence and cloaking that you cast suspicion upon yourself. If you believe as you declare in my presence, then speak so also in the church, in public lectures, in sermons, and in private conversations, and strengthen your brethren, and lead the erring back to the right path, and contradict the contumacious spirits; otherwise your confession is sham pure and simple, and worth nothing. Whoever really regards his doctrine, faith and confession as true, right and certain cannot remain in the same stall with such as teach, or adhere to false doctrine; nor can he keep on giving friendly words to Satan and his minions. A teacher who remains silent when errors are taught, and nevertheless pretends to be a true teacher, is worse than an open fanatic and his hypocrisy does greater damage than a heretic. Nor can he be trusted. He is a wolf and a fox, ready to despise, and to sacrifice doctrine, Word, faith, Sacrament, churches and schools. He is either a secret bedfellow of the enemies, or a skeptic and a weathervane, waiting to see whether Christ or the devil will prove victorious; or he has no convictions of his own, whatever, and is not worthy to be called a pupil, let alone a teacher; nor does he want to offend anybody, or say a word in favor of Christ, or hurt the devil and the world" (Walther, 39f).

This is just one example of what troubled Luther most of all before his death. Then why didn't he do something? It seems that he tried with every possible method to flush out the strange birds who posed as his friends but that it was his very character, so important to the Reformation, that kept things silent until after his death. It appears that especially those close to him felt the brilliance of his debating ability, the forcefulness of his speech, the power of his use of Scripture and

the fearlessness of his answers, and it kept many silent in their disagreement. Luther could not change the great gifts God gave him for the sake of the Reformation, for the return of the Biblical truths. He did not cease to present the true faith of Scripture in lectures, sermons and table talks. But if the enemy of truth keeps silent nothing can be accomplished to prevent the outburst that will come when Luther can speak no more.

And lest we think that because Melanchthon called the points of the Leipzig Interim adiaphora they were not serious, let's just remind ourselves of some of the points that stirred up all the dissension in the early Lutheran Church and threatened to destroy it completely, together with all that the Reformation had brought back to the sinner. It was the purpose of this Interim plan to escape persecution and the destruction of the churches. Thus the Interim rule was to retain the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith, but to yield to the Roman Church in the matter of ceremonies and the like, the unnecessary things, as Melanchthon considered it.

However, instead of retaining the doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), it was this doctrine that was compromised. Really all the provisions of the first (Augsburg) Interim were just toned down with words. The entire doctrine of justification by faith was presented in Roman Catholic terms so that it was able to be interpreted in the sense of "infused righteousness," *justitia infusa*. Faith was incorporated with other virtues, and good deeds were presented as necessary for salvation. In fact, it was presented in such a way that the individual would first have to be converted and be able to do good works and then God would accept this together with the work of Christ to justify the sinner.

The document indirectly admitted the Semi-Palagian teaching regarding original sin and free will, and was often silent on other very important doctrines. The Pope was recognized as the supreme head of Christ's Church, the bishops were restored to full power and authority, councils were again acknowledged as equal to the Word, ceremonies like the Corpus Christi Festivals were reinstated, and it goes without saying it that the Pope was no longer recognized as the Anti-Christ.

How could Melanchthon work out such a document? It was no doubt fear, perhaps courting a little favor, and his attitude of compromise that made it possible. He was ready to be molded by other men. Even John Calvin wrote to Melanchthon: "My grief renders me almost speechless. How the enemies of Christ enjoy your conflicts with the Magdeburgers appears from their mockeries. ... By yielding but a little, you alone have caused more lamentations and complaints than a hundred ordinary men by open apostasy" (Schluesselburg, 13,635; C.R. 593; Frank 4,88).

But he was the "natural" leader when Luther died. The Lutheran Church was ready to look to him for the expressions that once came from Martin Luther. So when he spoke out with such a lack of biblical sureness and without the fearless confidence in the Lord and His truth, it was bound to cause countless controversies and permit false doctrines which could destroy all that the Reformation had ever brought to mankind. It is true that Melanchthon had already shown his spirit in the Variata, but it did not seem to be recognized fully until after the death of Luther when there was no one else but Melanchthon to speak up as the avowed leader. Thus it has been pointed out many times that Melanchthon was indeed the cause of all the troubles in the Church of the Reformation as far as doctrine was concerned. This was mainly because of his position in the church and his vacillating attitude.

As far as the effectiveness of this new interim is concerned, it was short-lived. Either Emperor Charles was not powerful enough, or strong enough of will to carry things to completion, and he was suddenly halted in his progress. In fact, the greatest defeat was actually dealt him by Moritz (the Judas of Meissen). Moritz had what he wanted, the electorate of Saxony. In faith he was really not a Catholic, and he cooled quickly toward the objectives of the Emperor. All of this was greatly affected by the fact that his own father-in-law Phillip was not being released from prison. No doubt he never got to hear the end of that. Now he saw the opportunity once again to be the 'hero' of the people. He turned against Emperor Charles V and almost took him captive at Innsbruck, definitely cutting short his position of power and victory. Following these events the Lutheran Church and the Protestants in general gained more freedom.

But this did not end the controversies in doctrine. The death of Melanchthon in 1560 and the deaths of many other leaders did not alter many situations. The dissension remained. It often developed into great hatred because of the fact that two of the main Universities, Wittenberg and Leipzig, had been completely taken over by the spirit of false doctrine. Melanchthon had made many friends among the Calvinists, including John Calvin himself. Melanchthon had courted their affections in the hope of uniting the entire Protestant movement and making a truly 'big' front. The spirit of liberalism and unionism had a real foothold and political conditions did not make that much difference any more. The rulers could talk but they could not force a religious position upon the people, and certainly not on most of the theologians. So the political fall was complete in various ways.

### **New Life**

Yet at that time there were signs of new life as God chose men for His Formula. With this phrase we are not trying to say that the Formula of Concord as such was written by inspiration of God, but that it is only by the Grace of God that a document based upon Scripture alone can be developed and written to unite a church body in Christ Jesus and keep it from

being miserably split.

Perhaps we would not have chosen any of these men as the representatives of the movement for true unity in the church. After all, they were human beings and had their definite failings, each of which could have brought complete failure to that most important and delicate work. It was the Lord who by His grace and His Word could lead these men to work together, in spite of their frailty, and produce a document which to us and to them was so ultra important. The Lutheran Church was in the greatest danger of being destroyed from within as Luther feared, and four men were called out of the second generation of Lutherans to hold the line of truth. We have chosen these four men, for although some others briefly took part at various times they were not the “prime-movers,” so to speak.

### **Jacob Andrea**

Jacob Andrea was no doubt the most important of these men and at the same time the most controversial. In this man, however, the Lord chose a man for the people. He was “the Pastor.” He was brought into this world the son of a mercenary soldier and blacksmith. He was born in Waiblingen near Stuttgart in 1528, which was the middle of the Reformation. He was often reminded of his lowly origin by those that hated him. They called him “Smithy” or “Jack the Smith.”

His brilliant mind began its formal development in his home town, where he entered school at the age of six. It appeared he would sink into oblivion when, for financial reasons, he entered an apprenticeship as a carpenter. But his scholastic ability had been noted and he received a surprise Ducal Scholarship to the University. He entered at a very tender age and gained his master’s degree from the University of Tübingen, ranking second in his class, at the age of seventeen. One of his fellow students at the university was David Chytraeus, whom we shall meet later. He began his theological studies, but in one year he was called to the front in the Lord’s kingdom. So at the age of eighteen he became a pastor at Stuttgart. He was married to the twenty-year-old Johanna Entringer, known usually as Anna. She preceded him in death by seven years, but not before the Lord had blessed them with a family of eighteen children, nine sons and nine daughters!

As a “servant of the Lord” he was soon put to the test when the Smalcald War was lost and the Spanish Troops occupied Stuttgart. He was the only pastor who did not run to save his skin, and he refused to follow the Interim. His first teacher in the ministry was Erhard Schnef, a true Lutheran Reformation pastor. It was said: “No matter where this young man may stem from, there is no doubt but that Schnef hatched him.” His later teacher was equally prominent: John Brenz. Young Jacob now became pastor at Göppingen, for his own protection. His stand put him in danger. He continued his studies in theology and during this ministry received his doctorate in sacred theology.

Now came his full practical training as a pastor and missionary. He was sent at a very youthful age into various portions of his duke’s domain to “evangelicalize” the area. That is, he was to establish Lutheran congregations’ services, instruction and discipline. In church discipline he was at first taken up with Calvin’s system of coercion in faith, the town forcing the people into line. He soon learned this was not the evangelical method and his course changed. He was so energetic in his work that he was sent from area to area to take care of this important work. In fact, other rulers borrowed him to work with their men in various areas. Sometimes Duke Ulrich could spare him and sometimes the requests were refused.

It was in this manner that he worked with Martin Chemnitz. The Lord led Jacob to an understanding of and a true concern for the layman as a shepherd of great experience. During this period of his ministry when he was so very busy with practical matters and instruction of whole congregations - a most busy man - he was also drawn by his Duke into theological controversies which he tried, in spite of his youth, to resolve. Thus he was present with the Lutherans at the Worm’s colloquy. Here he saw the hopeless division in doctrine among the Lutheran delegations, as well as the ready abuse which the Catholics made of it. Here he also seemed to realize the need for restoring true unity among Lutherans.

The year was 1557. At this time he was still much taken up with the idea of compromise. He was writing to Calvin regularly, who had the idea that the Lutherans were just hiding under the umbrella of the Augsburg Confession and pampering themselves sleepily to avoid persecution.

In 1561 Jacob was sent with the president of the University of Tübingen to the Colloquy of Poissy in France. The president died while in France and when young Jacob returned to Tübingen, he found himself the president of the University of Tübingen at the tender age of thirty-three. He held this position until his death.

During the next years he worked into the field of “Peace and Unity” in the Lutheran Church. His first idea of compromise led him to continue working with Calvin. But as he became sure of his direction in the teaching of the Lord’s Supper he found a sharp cleavage developing. His work on the ubiquity of Christ completed the break, but he still thought he could convince or find a middle ground with the Phillipists at Wittenberg and Leipzig. Thus his language and efforts made most every doctrinal group suspicious of him. Yet nothing could stop this energetic man from pushing toward what seemed to him to be the most important thing at that time: peace and unity in the church.

He proceeded with a series of attempts in colloquies and synods to find the steps that were needed. He produced a confession which was entirely new, and revised it as criticism came to him, but he was rudely awakened when the Phillipists rejected him completely and branded him with special names. In this manner Andrea came around to the conviction that there was only one way for unity and that was to remain firm in the Scriptural truths. He would say it in a way that would not call people names and thus give offense, but he would remain firm and let the chips fall where they may. The Word of truth, and only that, would have to convince people. Then each would have to think it out for himself, not on the basis of the hateful character of the other fellow, but on the basis of "What does God really say?"

At the Synod of Zerst, Andrea had great hopes of finding a solution. This was 1570. But it was here that he saw that the teaching of the Lord's Supper had been hopelessly changed and the Phillipists would no longer give in to the truly Lutheran teaching of the real presence of the body of Christ. When the synod was over no report came out. Everyone was quiet, especially the Wittenberg professors. In fact, only Andrea spoke up and finally wrote his report. Some said: "If only that fellow would keep his mouth shut." But Andrea could not, for he saw that those who were not invited were becoming suspicious.

About that time Nikolaus Selnecker wrote a book of Christian instruction, *Institutio Religionis Christianae*. In the preface he rejoiced in the unity of faith his people had with the Württembergers and complimented Andrea highly for his contributions to the church. In answer Andrea produced his six sermons which became the foundation of the Formula of Concord. We should not think that he went about preaching these sermons. They were ninety-nine pages long, more than sixteen pages each. Andrea had once preached in the same vein and it took him thirty-three sermons to do it.

Why a sermon? Andrea was the pastor and a brilliant preacher. He thought of the people who were always becoming confused by all this argumentation and name calling. They would hear both sides quote the Scriptures. "Which shall we believe?" They heard Catholics say that only ten pastors or so still accepted the Augsburg Confession. They saw confused people led back to the Roman Church.

In the six sermons Jacob brought out the teachings of both sides very clearly and which Scriptures they quoted. Then he showed how any common Christian could and should take his Lutheran Catechism and there he would find the truths of Scripture he had learned. Then he could understand which party was Scripturally correct and which was misquoting. He sent copies to Chemnitz, Chytraeus and others, asking their opinion. He also asked them to study the sermons with other congregations and pastors. He would appreciate their criticism. His sermons were approved of very highly and criticized only because the sermon was not considered the proper medium for a confession of faith. From all of this developed the form and shape and words of the Formula of Concord, thesis and antithesis. With all of this Andrea also came to understand that a confession was needed and that it needed to be subscribed to. The others all saw this too, but it took the energy of one Jacob Andrea to travel to many people, as he had done before, to suffer much abuse, as he had suffered before, and finally to gain signatures from those who he believed agreed with this confession. The others would have to follow their own beliefs, false though they might be.

Then and today such a confession makes for enemies, especially among the liberals who think that modern churches have learned so much and progressed so far that now all persuasions can be joined together, even if they are not united in their beliefs. They cannot see now what would have happened to the Lutheran Church in its earliest days. But look at the decay that has set in today in the faith of the common people where such false doctrine can enter with a new pastor and destroy many souls. Jacob Andrea, the pastor and missionary, was very necessary for the Formula of Concord and the Lord made him the prime mover.

(to be continued)

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Correction: There is an omission in the previous issue of the Journal of Theology, March 2001. The beginning of line 23, page 32, should read: "believeth not is condemned ..." We apologize for the error.

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### **DAMNAMUS! The Art of Evangelical Polemics**

Rollin A. Reim

When a former member returned to Sioux City for a visit, I asked him for his reactions to the gospel ministry of the Synodical Conference church he had joined in San Diego (1952).

"Come to think of it," he said after a bit of reflection, "we aren't warned about much of anything." The way he said it made it clear. He felt he was missing something important: polemics, the Christian witness in the attack mode. It

is the partner of apologetics, the defense of the gospel against attacks from the outside.

It isn't hard to establish the propriety and need for polemics, for wielding the Sword of the Spirit (an offensive weapon). "So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning (νουθετων) each of you night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). So the Apostle Paul prepared the Ephesian elders for the day when men would arise from among them to distort the truth and draw away disciples.

With the Spirit's guidance, Paul even, on occasion, practiced *nominale elenchus* (refutation by name). "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all . . ." (Gal. 2:14 NIV). More often, as with Jesus ("Beware of false prophets, who . . ." Matt. 7:15), the perpetrators of false teaching are left unnamed, so the warning can be applied generally, wherever the shoe might fit.

### **Damnamus!**

The most vivid polemic of Scripture is generalized: "If **anybody** is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, **let him be eternally condemned**," αναθεμα εστω (Gal. 1:9). That frightful curse was directed also to himself, his coworkers, and even angels (1:8), should they come with a different "gospel." The polemic is not focused on some named individual, but on any effort to destroy the gospel, more a matter of protection than proscription.

The prototype of the αναθεμα was the כֶּרֶם (**cherem**) of the Old Testament. The imprecatory Psalms are the most familiar expressions. "If only you would slay the wicked, O God. . . . They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries **misuse your name**. Do not I hate those who hate you, O Lord?" (Ps. 139:22). In Hebrew fashion, his intensity of expression revealed the completeness of his love of his God and his God's honor. Did David know that the curses he summoned on the enemies of God would one day fall upon his Greater Son?

As one might expect, the polemics of the Apostolic Church were often directed at false teaching, although in the sixteenth chapter of Romans, it was the causers of division themselves who were to be avoided (τους τας διχοστασιας ... ποιουντας ... εκκλινατε απ αυτων, Rom. 16:17). Paul certainly got quite personal when he wrote of the Judaizers, "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (Gal. 5:12). But generally it was Satan's lies which received the condemnations. It is not easy for cursing to come out of a mouth commissioned to bless (Jas. 3:10). "When we are cursed, we bless; ... when we are slandered, we answer kindly" (1 Cor. 4:12-13).

### **In Luther's Time**

The response of the papacy to Luther's theses and the Leipzig debate was the perfervid *Damnamus* of the Bull *Exurge, Domine*. Luther responded in kind but with a difference: "If you persist in that madness of yours, we condemn you and, together with that bull and all the decretals of Satan, we consign you to the destruction of the flesh, so that your spirit may be set free together with you in the day of the Lord. In the name of Him whom you are persecuting, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen" (WA 6. 612, 21).

Our historic confessions are full of condemnations of contrary doctrine, and frequently of those who taught them. These are found in the antithesis structure that enhanced the clarity of the theses. For example:

"They (the Lutherans) condemn (*damnant*) the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost. . . . The Novatians also are condemned, who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance" (AC, Article XII).

It is interesting to note that even Melanchthon (the pussyfooting *Leisetreter*) adopted this mode when he added the following to what was initially read at Augsburg in 1530:

"They therefore condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify by the outward act and who do not teach that, in the use of the Sacraments, faith which believes that sins are forgiven, is required" (AC, Article XIII).

To say the least, those days were a time of vigorous polemics. No one could say of either side that they ended up praising an opposing view with faint damns!

[NOTE: The above quotations are from Bente, who followed the Latin version. Tappert used the German: *reject* for the milder *verwerfen*; *condemned* for *verdammt*. The Latin uses *damnamus*.]

[NOTE 2: In the AC these pejorative expressions are reserved to ancient heretics and contemporaries like the Anabaptists. About the strongest used against the Catholics appear in Article XV: "Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, *are useless and contrary to the Gospel*."]

### **Contemporary Confessions**

The *Common Confession* failed to establish that former differences in doctrine were indeed settled, for it lacked a forthright rejection of certain errors. When the newly organized Church of the Lutheran Confession drafted its *Concerning Church Fellowship*, it attempted unmistakable clarity with polemical statements such as:

“We reject and condemn any limitations . . .  
“We reject the teaching that . . .  
“. . . we reject the opinion that . . .  
“We reject as false the teaching which . . .  
“We reject as spurious the distinction which . . .  
“We also reject the idea of protesting fellowships when . . .  
“Finally, we reject the plea . . .” (CCF, 42-43)

Considering that *Concerning Church Fellowship* was modeled after the form of the Formula of Concord, you might expect some form of antithesis. The “*Damnamus*” is there, but in one respect there is a striking difference: certain false teachings are condemned, but the teachers are not named.

### Three Stages

In reviewing the practice of polemics throughout Biblical and Christian history, different degrees of intensity become apparent.

1) **Proclamation of “The Sound Doctrine** that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (2 Tim. 1:11). Light is the most potent weapon against darkness. It is said that bank tellers can learn to spot bogus money by much fingering of authentic bills.

2) **Rejection of a False Teaching** without identification of the teachers. So it occurs in *Concerning Church Fellowship*, where the negatives are, in effect, antitheses. So it is very often found in apostolic literature, where the error is cited along with a portrait of those who will peddle it. “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods” (1 Tim. 4:1-3a).

3) **Condemnation (“*Damnamus*”) of False Teaching and Those Who Teach it.** This occurs in Luther occasionally, often in the Book of Concord. It is not a curse, as the term seems to suggest, but an expression of the ban of exclusion or of separation from errorists by those who avoid them. While the passive voice might suggest that it is a non-combative action, termination of fellowship with errorists is none-the-less a powerful witness and judgment against error. It is the Bible-mandated way to condemn error, a peaceful polemic, you might say.

4) **Anathematizing the Heretic.** In the name of God the heretic is cursed or consigned to eternal condemnation. Examples include: Galatians 1:9, cited above; the bull of Pope Leo that Luther burned, also referred to above; the trials of John Hus and of Joan of Arc; the Salem witch trials; the Spanish Inquisition.

### Evangelical Polemics

Against the background of the foregoing history I would like to offer some personal reflections on the art of evangelical polemics. It is an art that I did not practice well. There have been numerous failures. Perhaps you will resonate to what follows. This is my counsel to myself.

When engaging in polemics, always **remember** to stay in character as a Minister of the Gospel. Even though it seems like a “foreign” work, it can be done in harmony with our primary mission of proclaiming the Good News.

A. The **purposes** of the negative form are the same as those of the positive form:

1. To retain the gospel in its truth and purity.
2. To give all glory to God.
3. To safeguard the faith of God’s people.
4. To help those who are ensnared by false teachers.

Note: Luther did not object to the practice of papal bans (published with pomp on Maundy Thursday) but to the papacy using them wrongly to promote the See’s financial and political interests.

The purpose of the Augsburg Confession might also help to explain its practice of singling out such as the Anabaptists for condemnation while avoiding such censure in the case of the papists. According to the Gensichen study there was a strong desire on the part of the Lutherans to demonstrate common ground with the Catholics.

In the light of modern church history we know how easily the concerns of church politics can affect the way polemics are played out. The apostle seems to have been purging himself of ulterior motives when he so forcefully defined his goals: “We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Cor. 13:8). A good question to ask of oneself when embarking on a polemic excursion: Why am I doing this? What do I hope to accomplish?

B. If it is to be evangelical, the **manner** of our polemics must be:

1. *honest and fair*. Let the opponents say what they believe and teach. Carefully identify what a church holds as

public confession, rather than what some writer says or a newspaper reports. Don't be afraid to say, "It *appears* to me (us) that this is what they are teaching or tolerating in their midst."

2. *objective*. Always avoid the *argumentum ad hominem*, the sleazy practice of attacking the person instead of the issue. Negative campaigning may be popular and effective in politics, but hardly appropriate in the work of the Gospel, in our faith life. Deal with issues in polemics; there is no need to impugn the motives of others.

3. *loving*. "Let your conversation always be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col. 4:6).

--*Putting the best construction* on everything, granting the benefit of the doubt. Not defaming these opponents, who are our "neighbors."

--*Constructive in purpose*, accentuating the positive when possible. Be Protestants literally.

--*Be anguished* in spirit for those Christians who are victimized by the false teachers. Be anguished that we must be separated from other believers whom we must avoid because of their connection to those who are troubling Israel.

--*Be humble!* Not easy for the orthodox who struggle constantly against the temptations to *Lehrgerechtigkeit*. Henry VIII is said to have been much offended by what he perceived as arrogance on the part of the German reformers. Even Luther's own heart threw the question in his face: "You alone are wise?" (Plass, *What Luther Says*, 3756)

4. *discriminating*. We are indeed called upon to discriminate. "Test all things and hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). We are not called to be judges. "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. . . . It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. 4:3). Those who are outside of our fellowship are certainly not accountable to us!

It is vital to discriminate carefully and note whether we are dealing with a difference in doctrine or a matter of **judgment**. Dealing with principle is one thing. Dealing with methods or forms or techniques is another. If we differ with someone in matters of judgment, we must certainly accord legitimacy to a practice which we choose (no doubt for good reasons) not to pursue. Our evaluation of the "Church Growth Movement" is putting us to the test these days. It is so natural, especially in time of disagreement, to claim divine sanction for one's way of doing things.

5. *wise*. There is a time and place for everything, including polemics. The pulpit? Perhaps not always the best place. According to the cynical world "churches are like politicians. They love to confess other men's sins." Warning against some prevailing error from the pulpit may be given without referencing the church or individual who teaches it. After all, it is the idea we want our people to recognize, whether they happen to meet it in Pope or Pentecostal. The Bible class is a more promising arena, since dialogue is possible. One-on-one is even better. In that setting we may more easily see or sense when people are bristling under the perception that we are launching a personal attack on the fine Mormon (Catholic, ELCA, etc.) person whom they know.

### In Summary

The practice of polemics surely is an art, a learned skill taught by the Spirit. It needs to be done, and done well, for as with surgery, the results of ineptitude can be disastrous. When done right we have every reason to expect healing of troubled spirits.

### Recommended Reading

*WE CONDEMN, How Luther and 16th Century Lutheranism Condemned False Doctrine*, translation by Herbert J. A. Bouman of DAMNAMUS, Hans-Werner Gensichen, Lutherisches Verlaghaus, 1955.

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## "Be ye angry and sin not."

οργιζεσθε και μη αμαρτανετε

Robert Mackensen

Was the apostle Paul here commanding or encouraging the Ephesian Christians to become angry? No way! Just a few verses later he wrote, "Let bitterness and wrath and anger . . . be put away from you" (4:31). In his letter to the Colossians, he again urges, "Put off all these: anger, wrath, malice . . ." (Col. 3:8).

Human anger is a work of the sinful flesh, not a fruit of Christian faith. The Bible says, "Cease from anger and forsake wrath" (Ps. 37:8). "Be not hasty in spirit to be angry, for anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Eccles. 7:9). "Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous" (Prov. 27:4). "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath" (Rom. 12:19). "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20). Our catechism lists anger as one of the ways in which murder begins.



Only the Lord God can become angry without sinning. "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). Yet He remains the Holy One of Israel. Only He is able to display holy wrath and righteous indignation. Sinless anger is an impossibility for Christians because of the wicked nature still clinging to them. God's prophet Jeremiah in chapter seventeen declared, "The heart is deceitful above all things and is desperately wicked: who can know it?" (17:9). The Christian's sinful nature uses "righteous indignation" as an excuse for ceasing to love a neighbor.

But what about Matthew 5:22? It says, "Whosoever is angry with his brother *without a cause* shall be in danger of the judgment." Do not those words permit Christians to be angry when there is good cause? We dare not depend too heavily on that phrase "without a cause." It is not found in many of the Greek manuscripts. Luther's Bible and most modern translations either omit the words or place them in the margin.

To understand better the "Be ye angry" of Ephesians 4:26, it helps to remember that Paul wrote those words in Greek to Greek-speaking people. The Greek language has more than one meaning for the imperative mood. In English the imperative mood almost always means to command: "Come here! Read this! Be angry!" But for Greek-speaking people the words, "Be ye angry" (οργιζεσθε) can also mean "If you are angry." For example, in John 2:19 it is written, "Destroy (λυσσατε) this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus was not *commanding* or *encouraging* the Jews to destroy His body but merely declaring, "If you destroy My body, I will raise it in three days." That is what the Apostle Paul is saying in Ephesians 4:26, namely, "If you are angry, be on guard against sinning." The apostle was warning the Ephesian Christians about the danger associated with becoming angry. The New International Version translates Ephesians 4:26 well: "In your anger do not sin." Unfortunately, Luther and many of the modern translations stay with the "Be angry but do not sin."

The apostle Paul quoted these words of Ephesians 4:26 from Psalm 4:4, which the King James Version translates as "Stand in awe and sin not." The difference in wording results because the King James Version translated directly from the Hebrew original while the Apostle Paul quoted from the Septuagint translation.

As we know, the Septuagint translation was made several hundred years before Christ and the inspired writers of the New Testament frequently quoted from it. Although the Greek Septuagint was not inspired, yet whenever God the Holy Spirit guided the New Testament writers to quote from it, we accept that Greek quotation as the Word of God. Therefore both the King James Version "Stand in awe" and the Septuagint "Be ye angry" are scriptural as long as we keep in mind that here the Greek imperative can mean "If you are angry."

Further study reveals that the Hebrew word in Psalm 4:4 (רָגַז), translated as "Stand in awe" by the King James Version and as "Be ye angry" by the Septuagint, occurs forty-one times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Most often the word is translated as *tremble, be afraid, be disquieted, be troubled* or *quake*. The King James Version translates the word as *anger, wrath* or *rage* only eight of the forty-one times. Even the Septuagint authors translated the word as *anger, rage* or *wrath* only eleven times.

Translations of Psalm 4:4 vary. Luther, the Revised Standard Version, and the New King James Version stay with the Septuagint "Be ye angry." The New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, the King James II, Goodspeed, Green and others translate Psalm 4:4 as "Tremble and sin not" or "Let awe restrain you from sin" or "In your anger sin not."

The bottom line for us Christians today is this: Ephesians 4:26 warns against becoming angry. The sinful nature still clinging to Christians looks for opportunity to display its irate nature. Therefore God's children must be especially careful when they feel angry.

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## THE NECESSITY FOR HUMILITY IN THE MINISTRY

**"He must increase, but I must decrease."**

Terrel Kesterson

Humility, the fairest, loveliest flower  
That grew in Paradise, and the first to die,  
Has rarely flourished since on mortal soil.  
It is so frail, so delicate a thing,  
'Tis gone, if it but look upon itself;  
And they who venture to believe it theirs  
Prove by that single thought they have it not.

Tryon Edwards

The pastor stood at the back of the church after the service was over, greeting the members. Before him was a four year old girl who looked so pretty with her hair curled and tied with ribbons, and her lovely dress. "You look nice today," the pastor told her. With bright eyes and a big smile on her face she innocently exclaimed, "Yes I do!" and skipped away. Her mother stepped up and said, "Pastor, I got so much out of your sermon today. Your sermons are always helpful and encouraging." The pastor hemmed and hawed a bit and mumbled, "Thank you." What is wrong with this picture?

"Jesus ... laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. ... And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at table again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right; for so I am. If I then, the Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them'" (John 13 :3ff.). Our Lord Jesus Himself recognizes the necessity for humility in the ministry, and demands it.

### **1. The Necessity for Humility as Christians**

"There is no humility so deep and real as that which the knowledge of God's grace produces."

– Andrew Miller

"The natural mind is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so" (Rom. 8:7). Jesus says, "Unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as (a) child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3-4). God must humble us so that we may be Christians. The Lord must humble us to see the truth about ourselves; that we "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); that "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). We are poor, miserable sinners in God's sight who cannot do a single thing to make ourselves right with Him. So God leads us to despair of our own righteousness in order that we may be filled with Christ and His righteousness. It is when God humbles us that we can appreciate what the Bible says: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). We humbly, joyfully stand in awe before the grace of our God who assures us that all has been done for us by Jesus. As we "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, ... (we) shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Our human pride, on the other hand, has the terrible ability to kill our faith in the Lord and damn us to hell. To be a Christian means Christ helping us daily to humble ourselves before the Lord. When the Lord seeks to confront us with our sins, our pride would have us resist it and ignore it and make excuses for ourselves. Pride is a heavy weight that drags us down. Pride robs us of peace. But in humbly confessing our sins to the Lord we gratefully receive His blessed forgiveness. The Psalmist says, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me.... I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;' and You forgave the guilt of my sin" (32:3-5). When the Lord tries to accomplish His will in us, our pride says, "My will be done!" We cause ourselves grief upon grief if we are not ready to bow before the Lord and His Word. "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

"Walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8c). What is God-pleasing humility? It is not being humble to bury or hide our talents so people will not notice them and we can keep humble about them. The Lord wants us to use the gifts He has given us and develop them so they can get even better. If we have a problem with pride over our gifts and accomplishments, burying them or hiding them is not dealing with our pride. The proud attitude is still there. We need to use our gifts and ask the Lord to change our attitude so that we can be humble about them. "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Some people do not know how to accept the well-intentioned praise of others. It is not necessarily being humble immediately to change the subject, or to say that it was nothing whenever someone tries to compliment us. It is a bit of an insult to that person, as if he does not know what he is talking about or should not compliment us. If as pastors someone says he liked a sermon we preached, do we respond with words that in effect say it was nothing? What was nothing? Was the Word of God we spoke nothing?? Was the guidance the Lord gave us in writing the sermon nothing?? Was the help the Lord gave us to preach the sermon nothing?? If there was nothing about it that was nothing, do not say it was nothing. Our talents and abilities are blessings God has given us to enjoy. In our effort to be humble about them, if we belittle them we are in effect belittling God who gave them to us.

"Whether ... you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Humility is using the gifts God gives us to His glory, not ours. The Lord asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Everything I am and have that is good is from God. What reason do I have to brag about myself? Unfortunately, my

sinful human nature is always trying to get me to say: “Look at me! Look at what I have! Look at what I can do!” “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself taking the form of a bondservant” (Phil. 2:5-7a). My Lord Jesus, the Son of God, has everything and can do anything; yet He is humble. What right do I, a sinful human being, have to be proud? (Nolting, Paul D., *A Devotional Study Of Philipians 2:5-11 Lessons In Humility Learned From Our Lord!*, 3-6)

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph. 4:32-5:2). “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:3-5). Humility is being loving and forgiving and having a self-sacrificing attitude, like Jesus. Humility is using the gifts God gives us to serve others, for Jesus’ sake (Nolting, 6-8).

There is only one way to learn true humility, and that is from Jesus Christ. He invites us, “Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Jesus humbly accepted His Father’s will that He suffer and die on the cross, and He willingly obeyed. Jesus never did anything for selfish reasons or for self glory. As He said of Himself, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Whenever we are tempted to be proud, whenever it is hard for us to humble ourselves before God or man because “it isn’t fair!”; whenever we think we know better than our Heavenly Father, we need only look to our Savior and all He endured for us. Jesus teaches us to be humble, as He is.

## **2. The Necessity for Humility as Pastors**

It is all too natural for us humans to base much of our self worth on what kind of job we have and how much money we make. The Lord told the prophet Jeremiah, “Everywhere I send you, you shall go” (Jer. 1:7). The Apostle Paul says of the Lord’s ministers, “We are fools for Christ’s sake, ... we are weak, ... we are without honor, ... we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things” (1 Cor. 4:10-13). It is only when the Lord works humility in the heart of a man that he is willing and happy to accept a call into the ministry wherever his Lord wants him to go, whatever the circumstances, even if the pay is low.

Whether we are pastors or whatever we do, the prouder we are about ourselves, the less we rely on God to help us. Pride can keep us from using and developing our gifts to serve the Lord to the best of our ability. The Lord must humble us so that we understand our sin, our weakness, and our need for His help. Only by relying on the Lord and His strength will we be what He intends us to be for Him.

It is often through trials and difficulties in their ministry that the Lord teaches His pastors humility and reliance on Him. As Paul was beginning his ministry, Jesus said, “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). Paul encouraged Timothy, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the Gospel according to the power of God. ... Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:8; 2:3). Paul learned to say, “I am well content with weaknesses, ... with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). It is only when we are emptied of ourselves that we can be filled with Christ. Martin Luther remarks:

God also chooses poor sinners, such as St. Paul and (us) ..., to preach so that He may restrain the presumption and conceit of wiseacres. For He does not want to have such bold and presumptuous spirits for this work. He wants people who have gone through the mill, who have been tried and broken; who are conscious of it and must confess that they have been wicked rogues, ... so that preachers remain humble, cannot become arrogant and boast ... that they were so pious, holy, and learned that God had chosen them (Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, II/2098).

Who am I seeking to glorify in my ministry, myself, or Christ? As pastors, when we are tempted to be proud about our accomplishments and abilities, we need to turn to Scriptures such as Luke 17:10: “When you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’” May the Lord give us the attitude of John the Baptist, who said of Christ, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). With Paul we say, “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14a). “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:7-8).

Commenting on Christ washing His disciples’ feet, Luther warns us:

We should bear in mind that we are not preachers and ministers of the church in order to be great lords but to be meek and humble, faithfully to lead our churches, and to serve our neighbor with all the gifts we have and in this way constantly to wash the feet of others. Thus special honor and pleasure are given to the Lord Christ. Moreover,

there is no better way for us to guard against the devil and his snares. For preachers especially are subject to this temptation: The devil attempts to induce them to seek their own honor and profit. If he is successful, he has won. For then they ... have so much to do with worldly affairs that they pay no attention to the Lord Christ, His Word, His Church, and the true worship of God, but quite forget them. We have examples before our eyes, and they are entirely too evident. No minister of the church should consider himself safe against this temptation (Plass, 2947).

I do not doubt at all that at that very time, when He showed such humility by washing feet, the Lord saw what would happen in church government, particularly in the last times. He saw that the bishops quarreling among themselves and everybody wanting to have precedence began very soon (Plass, 2948).

In condemning the pride of the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said, “they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places” (Matt. 23:5-6). The temptation for us as clergy to forget our place and seek to glorify ourselves is very real. It is tragic to see the politics going on in so many churches at the expense of the gospel. Individuals lobby to achieve a higher standing within their synodical body, with a bigger salary. In the process, lambs for whom the Shepherd died are being neglected, abused, and starved. Those within such churches who dare to question the powers that be and seek to follow the Word of God are trampled. One blessing of a small church body may be that there is less worldly glory to seek for oneself. If a minister wants prestige and lots of money, a little synod such as ours is the wrong place. May we never forget that our sole purpose as a church is to preach Jesus Christ, and Him crucified! (1 Cor. 2:2)

### **3. The Necessity for Humility in our Ministry**

The Lord tells His ministers, “shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God, and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:2-4). In dealing with the souls entrusted to his care, humility on the pastor’s part is an absolute necessity. There is sinful pride in both the pastor and his members; a real potential for disaster. Pride can lead a person to say things he later wishes he had not said. Pride can confuse other people’s words in our minds. Pride can make us absolutely certain someone has said something which, in reality, is the exact opposite of what he actually said. We pastors want to be constantly praying that the Lord would help us humbly to follow His Word and obey His will as we work with our people.

A pastor can learn so much about humility in the ministry from the way the Lord conducted His earthly ministry. Jesus said what needed to be said, no more and no less. He did not beat around the bush. He did not allow those He was addressing to get Him off the subject of what they needed to hear. He boldly condemned sin and unrepentant sinners with the law. He lovingly sought even His enemies, and comforted repentant sinners with the unconditioned gospel. In nothing that Jesus said or did while on earth can He be said to lack love or tact or humility.

When our Lord was on trial before the Jews, they lied about Him and beat Him and wrongly condemned Him to death. He knew the trial was rigged against Him, yet He did not whine or beg or rant and rave over how wrong and unfair it all was. Jesus did not try to defend Himself; because He knew it was His Father’s will that He die. When asked if He was the Son of God, Jesus answered, “I am” (Mark 14:62). He knew they would put Him to death for saying it, but He had to tell them the truth. Jesus wanted to save them, but they would not listen. They refused to believe in Him.

Our Lord did not have to right every wrong done to Him or disprove every false accusation brought against Him or get revenge on His enemies in order to prove that He was right. As He was dying on the cross He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Peter says, “(Christ) committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth. When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to (the Father) who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:22-23). Jesus acted exactly the way He should have. He said just what should have been said. He said and did all He could, and entrusted everything into His Father’s hands.

Peter tells us, “This finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Pet. 2:19-21). As Christians, the Lord sometimes calls upon us to suffer, even unfairly, for His sake. When we do, we understand better what our Lord suffered so unjustly for our sakes. We learn from our Savior how to bear up humbly under suffering.

As pastors, when those we are trying to serve treat us badly, we do not have to right every wrong done to us. We do not have to make sure everything is “fair.” We do not have to be able to convince those in error of the truth. We do not have to make sure somehow that everyone likes us. We do not have to clear up every misunderstanding about us. We do not have to get revenge. Instead, we need to keep turning to the Word of God and praying for guidance. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (Jas. 1:5). “Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything” (2 Tim. 2:7). We do the best we can at the

time to bring a member the Word of God which he needs to hear. We cannot torture ourselves by ‘second guessing’ the wisdom and the help the Lord gives us. We ask the Lord for the humility to see any mistakes we may have made and where we may have been in the wrong. Even if someone should criticize us in a wrong spirit, we ask the Lord for the humility to see if there is any truth in that person’s accusations against us. We ask the Lord to help us learn from the situation. Finally, we ask the Lord for the humility to entrust everything into His hands

(1 Cor. 4:1-5; see Kretzmann).

The Apostle Paul tells us pastors, “God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power” (2 Tim. 1:7). Do not confuse humility with timidity. Humility in the ministry does not mean that we should say nothing when someone is being disrespectful toward the ministry. We should point out to him that the Lord says, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17). Humility in the ministry does not mean that we should say nothing when someone is being disrespectful toward the Word of God. We should point out to him what the Lord says to His faithful ministers: “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me” (Luke 10:16).

“Be angry, and yet do not sin” (Eph. 4:26a). “(Speak) the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15a). “A bishop must ... not (be) violent, ... but gentle, not quarrelsome” (1 Tim. 3:2-3). “But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:23-26). Humility does not mean that we should not confront sin and error. We should. Humility means we want to watch out for our personal feelings when dealing with a member who is in the wrong. In humility, we pastors want to ask the Lord to help us avoid losing our temper. If we lose our temper with a member, we make it that much harder for him to listen to what we are saying. We want to avoid being led off the subject. We want to keep our message short and to the point for the member’s sake. We want our member to be left with a message from us that is exactly what he needs to hear from the Word of God. In humility, a pastor realizes that the important thing is not that he wins an argument, but that he does all he can to restore a wandering sheep to Christ’s sheepfold (Luke 15:1-7).

Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11). The Good Shepherd loves us so much that He gave His life on the cross to save us. The Scriptures tell us pastors, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Jesus puts His own self-sacrificing love into the hearts of His faithful shepherds toward those entrusted to their care. If we harbor hard feelings toward members who hurt us, we can damage and destroy that love. “Serve the Lord with gladness” (Ps. 100:2a). If we harbor hard feelings toward those who hurt us, we can rob ourselves of the joy of serving the Lord in the ministry. In humility, we ask the Lord to help us forgive others for their personal attacks against us. We need to humble ourselves before the Lord, asking Him to help us both to see and to get rid of any hard feelings we may have toward others. It can be terribly difficult to continue loving and forgiving members who continue to hurt us. It can be done if we remember Christ, who forgave even those who crucified Him. Whatever the cost to himself, the driving force within a faithful shepherd is the eternal salvation of the souls in his care (2 Cor. 12:15a; Phil. 2:17).

### **Some Final Thoughts from Luther**

One must differentiate between God’s honor and man’s honor. When God’s honor is concerned, do not be humble. Do not listen to others, who are greater and more learned than you are. Grant that they have these gifts; but they are nonetheless not more learned or higher than the divine Word, which is God’s alone; for the Word is the master of all masters. You are not greater or mightier than this Word. You and I must be subject to this Word. The Word is not mine or yours. Therefore say: I will not set you above God’s Word and let you be right when you are wrong. To this day they urge us to do their bidding. If we say that we have God’s Word in our favor, they reply: We also have it. Why, you people are proud and want to oppose the emperor and the king. Well, it is not pride but great humility when we serve God and confess His Word. But if it is pride, it is a godly and Christian pride; and let no man confuse this for me (Plass, 2103).

People speak of two kinds of humility: one which we are said to owe when doctrine and faith are concerned, the other when love toward our neighbor is concerned. But may God never grant me humility when the articles of faith are concerned. For then no action is called for which is a yielding for the sake of love, for the sake of peace and unity, for the sake of keeping the church from being ruined, or for the love of the imperial majesty. The fanatics and sectarians are complaining about us as though no humility and love were found among us. But we reply: first abolish the Word, doctrine, and faith; for in these matters we will not budge a handbreadth though heaven and earth were to fall because of our firmness. For the Word does not belong to me; neither do Baptism and the Lord’s Supper belong to me. God has reserved these for Himself and has said: You are to teach in this way! I cannot pass

this injunction by. Therefore your will must yield. But when we speak like this, they say that we are proud people. In reality, however, this is true humility. God has commanded us to take this attitude. We are to connive at no omissions from His Word. But come, touch on a matter that concerns love. If I then do not humble myself before you and do not bear injuries that are inflicted upon me, if I then do not yield what is mine and God has given me, if I then do not want to forgive you and wash your feet, then you may rebuke me.... By the grace of God we would be glad to lie at the feet of everybody if only the Word of God remained pure and people did not interfere in God's affairs. Then men would find us as humble and patient as any sheep may be. We have been of greater service to them than they have been to us. Still they say that we are proud and cannot love the brethren or pardon anything in them, that when people enrage us, we can neither forgive nor forget. The devil thanks you for saying this. I should grant you what is not mine? If only my finger or my body were concerned, you would find me ready to serve you promptly. But neither my coat nor my body is at stake; rather we are expected to yield in God's affairs. This we find impossible to do (Plass, 2104).

Dear Lord, to Thy true servants give  
The grace to Thee alone, to live.  
Once bound by sin, but saved by Thee,  
They go to set the prisoners free,  
The Gospel message to proclaim  
That men may call upon Thy name.  
They gladly go at Thy command  
To spread Thy Word o'er sea and land.  
Be Thou with them and make them strong  
To heal sin's ills, to right the wrong.  
Thou rulest over wind and wave,  
And mighty is Thine arm to save.  
When all their labor seems in vain,  
Revive their sinking hopes again;  
And when success crowns what they do,  
Oh, keep them humble, Lord, and true  
Until before Thy judgment seat  
They lay their trophies at Thy feet.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, #482)

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### BOOK REVIEWS

#### Gospel Gems from the Forties

**Egbert Schaller: Selected Sermons of E. Schaller, Paul and Anne Koch, 2001, spiral bound, 182 pages.**

**Norman A. Madson: Evening Bells at Bethany and Evening Bells at Bethany II.**

The forties were a time of great upheaval in our world. World War II for the United States began in 1941 and ended in victory in 1945. Then the servicemen came home and the baby boomers were born. It was a time to consider God's severe judgments and His continuing grace. It was a time for God's voice to be spoken and heard in the midst of all the turmoil and confusion of the day.

Nicollet and Mankato, Minnesota, are less than fifteen miles distant from each other. In these two towns two ambassadors for Christ were at work in the forties, one a parish pastor, the other a seminary professor. At that time both of these men were members of synods affiliated with the Lutheran Synodical Conference. Both of these men later played

prominent roles in the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) in the late fifties and early sixties, particularly in connection with the doctrine of church and ministry. We are speaking of Pastor Egbert Schaller, pastor at the time of Trinity Lutheran Church of Nicollet, and Dean Norman A. Madson of Bethany Lutheran Seminary of Mankato.

What did these two men say in God's name at that time in those places? Do we have a record of their voices? Yes, we do, for some of their words have been put into print for our edification. Some of Dean Madson's chapel talks at Bethany have been available for some time in two books, *Evening Bells at Bethany* with a 1948 copyright, and *Evening Bells at Bethany II*, with a 1952 copyright. The CLC Publishing Division currently has both volumes on its list of planned reprints. Much more recently, in the present year of 2001, some of Pastor Schaller's sermons have become available in a collection of 32 sermons for the festival half of the church year, entitled *Selected Sermons* of E. Schaller, available from his daughter and son-in-law, Anne and Paul Koch.

As we read these meditations on God's Word, we recognize a distinct difference in style and content. Dean Madson's chapel talks are filled with allusions to literature and history, references to Martin Luther and the Lutheran confessions, and copious quotations from Scripture and Christian hymns based on Scripture. Almost every one of Madson's chapel talks in both books ends with a hymn verse. Dean Madson often referred to events of the day, such as the visit of the German theologian Martin Niemoeller to America in 1947 or the papal pronouncement in 1950 of the assumption of Mary to heaven. His vocabulary is a bit more difficult than what we are used to, with some use of foreign words and technical expressions, but we have to remember that he was addressing students of theology. And of course Madson always greeted his listeners with the term "Fellow redeemed" because he believed that in so doing he was addressing all his listeners, whether believers or unbelievers.

Here, for example, is one paragraph from a chapel talk delivered on October 2, 1950 (*Evening Bells at Bethany II*, p. 14):

If our soul is to be saved, it will have to be made right with God. And that was accomplished by Christ's atonement for our sins. God no longer looks upon us as sinners when we in humble faith plead the merits of His Son, but looks upon us in Christ as though we had never sinned. That is the sum and substance of that wisdom revealed by our heavenly Father when He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Second Corinthians 5:21. Mine is not an "infused righteousness," as is taught by the church of the Antichrist, but an imputed righteousness. My righteousness as a believer lies outside of me and in Christ. But His righteousness becomes mine by the Father's accounting me righteous for Christ's sake. That is the marvelous forensic act which God pronounced by raising His Son from the dead – for our justification. Romans 4:25.

When we now turn to a reading of Schaller's sermons, we find a more sustained development and application of a particular text and fewer quotations from other sources or even from other Scriptures. Since Schaller is the author of our confessional document, *Concerning Church and Ministry*, we know he can write long and involved English sentences. But in these sermons most of his sentences are short and easily understood.

For example, listen to these paragraphs from a sermon on the prophet Elijah (pp. 58-59):

God can speak in many ways to men, and He does. He fills their hearts with fear when He speaks from Mt. Sinai with the voice of His Law, commanding, threatening. Every storm, each earthquake, war, pestilence, flood, blizzard, fire – and the daily papers are full of them – goes out from the Holy God, telling of His wrath over sin, of His power to kill and destroy. He forces men to listen to Him, but He wins none. They shudder, bow before the storm, but after it is over, they are still where they were. Their hearts are not won; nothing is changed. So it had been in the experience of Elijah. Through Him God had spoken on Mt. Carmel; everybody had understood, but nobody had changed. Elijah called it a failure.

And in this sense, the Church is failing today. God has been sweeping through the world with His terrible voice of war and destruction, but it has not swept souls into His arms. The Church has preached the Law of God, it has showed His will to sinners, it has warned and threatened. Yet still even those who listened continue to serve Baal. Again and again we hear saints express the wish that sermons might grow sharper, that the Church would hurl thunder-bolts at those who so gaily worship at the altar of the Baal of drink, divorce, gambling. Let the Church crack down on people, frighten them as only the anger of the Holy God can frighten them – then the kingdom of God will come.

Dear friends, thunder and lightning will not stop men in their sins for long; certainly it will never turn them to the Lord. A church that could preach nothing but the Law of God – either the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount – had better never been born. For neither the Ten Commandments nor the Sermon on the Mount were intended to turn men to God, but are given for God's people. As we heard today, love is the fulfilling of the Law. It is so in men who love God, who trust in Him. They have not been drawn by the fearful voice from Sinai, but by the still, small voice from the fainting God upon the cross. Our Lord is in the still, small voice that says: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' If Israel will not leave Baal when it hears this

invitation from our Lord, it will never leave Baal at all.

There is not much reference to world events in these sermons. In that sense they are timeless, applying to us today just as well as to the congregations of the forties or fifties. Not that the great war and its aftermath was neglected altogether. I was struck particularly by these words spoken on Jan. 1, 1944 (p. 36):

I believe that 1943 can be framed and hung on the wall as the year in which more terrible things happened to more people than at any other time in the world's history. The Flood destroyed only a small number of people, by comparison. The burning of Sodom and Gomorrah was a little thing. In 1943 things took place on earth the horror of which is so great that our minds are not big enough to grasp it."

This sermon goes on to show how God allows such horrible things to happen in order to lead us to repentance. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (See Luke 13: 1-5).

Let us end this survey by quoting an eloquent paragraph or two that illustrates why our heading "Gospel Gems from the Forties" is not out of place. In a sermon on 1 John 4:9-14 we hear these words (pp. 128-129):

Would you send your son into a flaming building? Would you cast him into a pit of vipers? Would you order him into a house where the black pestilence rages? God did that, and more. The world was a horrible place in His sight, full of disease and death. It was the last place to send a beloved Son. And what must happen did, of course, happen. The Son died terribly. All the cursed evil of this world, where there was no love, rushed in upon Jesus Christ and slew Him. It was a fearful sight, but it was a wonderful love.

For this was the world's need, its one need. It had everything else already – the starry heavens, the wonderful earth with its fruits, an opportunity to live and thrive – and in the midst of all this plenty, man had brought death upon himself, had earned it by his disobedience and wickedness against the good God. Every which way he turned, the road to life was blocked; every way you looked, you saw men, living here in the midst of plenty, plunging into death and over the edge into eternal damnation. There was only one help, but that was too expensive, too impossible. God must get in the way of death. He Himself must take sin upon Him and give His own life for it. Nobody of human heart would do such a foolish thing – but it would be done by God's love, which requires anything at any price for man. Where every other door was shut, God provided a new one at the cost of His Son. Through His crucified body we walk now into a place where sin is forgiven, where death is swallowed up in victory. 'In this was manifested the love of God.' So did the stranger love come to us, to live among us.

Information for ordering the book of Schaller's sermons: One copy -- \$6.00 postpaid. Two through five copies -- \$5.50 each, postpaid. Six or more copies -- \$5.00 each, postpaid. Order from Paul R. Koch, 3425 Morgan Ave., Eau Claire, WI 54701-7023. Phone 715-835-5083, e-mail: parekoak@aol.com.

– David Lau