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|---------------------|---|
| Editor              | Steven Sippert<br>513 Ingram Dr.<br>Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701-5913  |
| Assistant Editor    | Elton Hallauer  |
| Circulation Manager | Benno Sydow bennosydow@yahoo.com<br>2750 Oxford Street North<br>Roseville, Minnesota 55113                                  |
| Staff Contributors  | F. Gantt, N. Greve, T. Kesterson, D. Lau, D. Maas,<br>P. Naumann, J. Pfeiffer, D. Reim, M. Roehl,<br>D. Schaller, P. Tiefel |

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# Making the Word of God Fully Known

James Albrecht

It was Wednesday evening, August 1, 2007, and traffic was at a near standstill. Many commuters were on their way home after a long day at the office. Others were crossing the river *en route* to the evening's activities. Some were talking on cell phones; some pondered the day's events; some quietly cursed the gridlock stretching out before them. At 6:05 the unthinkable happened. The massive, 1,900 foot long I-35 bridge collapsed into the waters below. Since 1965 this structure had safely carried almost 150,000 vehicles a day from one side of the river to the other. Incredibly, she now lay twisted and ruined in and beside the Mississippi beneath her.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the bridge collapse is that it happened at all. Crossing bridges is such a normal part of life that, unless something like this happens, we never give their reliability much thought. What is true of physical overpasses is true of spiritual bridges as well. The "bridge" in this case is the foundation of one's Christian faith.

The majority of American Christians point to the Bible as the basis for their faith and convictions. That sounds good and would be good except for the fact that many in America don't really know what the Bible teaches. When asked, "Is the expression '*God helps those who help themselves*' in the Bible?" less than half (38%) of self-identified Christians answered correctly. One fourth (26%) of born-again Christians believe that Jesus committed at least some sins during His time on earth.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly every Christian denomination today makes the claim, "We teach what the Bible teaches." Two churches can be miles apart in doctrine, and yet both claim that their church is the one that follows Scripture. If you compared their teachings, however, you might think that they were using two different Bibles. Closer scrutiny would probably reveal that one or both were teaching more than what the Bible teaches. Or in some cases less.

Ours is an age that has largely subscribed to the Post-modernist creed that "*all truth is relative. What is right for you may not be right for someone else. Therefore you cannot say that you are right and another is wrong.*" Churches, once distinguishable by doctrinal positions, have united under the cover of religious tolerance and broadmindedness. What matters today is not what is believed but how firmly and passionately one believes it.

Where does the Church of the Lutheran Confession fit into the scene of modern American Christianity? For almost 50 years God has blessed our church body by preserving His Word among us. By God's grace alone yesterday's doctrinal issues have been resolved on the basis of Scripture. And yet it would be naïve to think that we have escaped the *Zeitgeist* of our times. All who seek to be faithful to Scripture have felt the push or pull to back off in their convictions.

Given the religious climate of our age and the pressure of our culture, the topic before us is a critical one. It is a good time for self-evaluation and repentance. It is a good time to assess whether we are being faithful in our stewardship of the Word. Do we proclaim the whole counsel of God in spite of societal trends? Are we willing to stand apart from the world, to sacrifice and suffer if need be, in order to remain faithful to our Savior?

In connection with the 2008 CLC Convention theme and prayer, "May We Be Found Faithful Stewards of the Mysteries of God," this essay seeks to address the topic *Making the Word of God Fully Known*, with focus given to the inspired words of Colossians 1:24-26: "**Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints**" (NIV).

## I. Making the Word of God fully known in spite of opposition and suffering

Making the Word of God fully known can be understood in two ways. It can be extensive,

meaning that the gospel needs to reach everyone in the world. This is what Paul had in mind in Romans 15:19: *"From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."*

It can also be intensive, meaning that the Word is proclaimed in its totality. In his emotional farewell with the elders of Ephesus, a tearful Paul had recalled, *"I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God"* (Acts 20:26-27).

Both meanings apply to our Colossians passage. Both apply to us. While we do not have the call to apostleship as Paul did, we do have the call to proclaim the whole counsel of God. We are to be His witnesses throughout the world. We are to teach all nations all things that He has commanded us. The Great Commission contains a stewardship that is our privilege and responsibility to fulfill. When we remember whose Word we are speaking and how it impacts people eternally, it should be the easiest thing on earth.

Unfortunately, we all know that just the opposite is often true. Making the Word fully known means having to say things that aren't widely accepted. In fact, some of them are stubbornly rejected.

People may be friendly, kind, and interested in the church until you tell them that living together without being married is a sin. They may be cordial until they are asked to refrain from communing or when we don't join them in the exercise of their religion. There are blank stares when you explain that forgiveness is really God's free gift. It's not so much a look of mockery as it is of dull indifference. Sometimes people become irate when the Word we speak has opened a wound or touched a nerve in their lives. One thing is certain: those who make the Word fully known can and should expect opposition.

Jesus found that to be true when He preached in His hometown of Nazareth. At first the people were overjoyed to have their most famous resident address them in the synagogue of His childhood. But as Jesus expounded the Word, as He touched their lives with both law and gospel, the mood turned ugly and violent. Soon a mob attempted to push Him off a nearby cliff (Luke 4:16-30).

As part of his visions on the isle of Patmos and recorded in Revelation, the Apostle John ate up the little book (Rev. 10:1-11). And as the angel predicted, it was as sweet as honey in his mouth but became bitter in his stomach. The reason? Because the gospel that is sweetness to the soul of a penitent sinner will be opposed and rejected by others.

Jesus warned, *"But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them"* (Mark 13:9). Less than a year later Stephen became the first martyr of the New Testament. Others would follow. Herod would execute James and imprison Peter. Paul would be stoned at Lystra, beaten at Philippi, run out of town at Berea, mobbed and arrested in Jerusalem. Jesus said, *"You will be hated by all for My name's sake"* (Matt. 10:22). The opposition and suffering were directly related to making the Word fully known.

The temptation, of course, is to back away from the issues that may incur the world's wrath. Most churches have learned that the way to get along in this world is to make the Word partially known. No one will bother you if you tell them what they want to hear. John the Baptist was not thrown into prison for telling Herod, "Jesus wants you to be prosperous and happy." The hardship came from condemning Herod for his adultery. Jeremiah was not lowered into the miry pit for telling the people of Jerusalem how special they were, but for daring to call them to repentance. Isaiah and Elijah, Peter and John, Stephen and Paul—all shared this in common: they endured hardship and suffering because they made the Word fully known.<sup>2</sup>

It is no surprise that the Word is a lightning rod for the world's hatred. *"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"* (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

Unbelievers then and now fall into two basic categories; believers may encounter the religious and the irreligious.<sup>3</sup> The religious oppose the Word because it rejects their manmade

righteousness as inadequate, sinful filth. The irreligious, or nonreligious, oppose the Word because it rejects their "wisdom" as foolishness.

There is also an unseen conspiracy against the Word, masterminded not by the ACLU but by the prince of this world, the archenemy of God and His people. Though he himself is not visible, his presence and power are evident. We can see the lack of love, the immorality, the selfish attitudes, the struggles between husbands and wives, the apostasy of the church, and the spread of many false teachings. What we cannot see are the powers of darkness lurking and operating behind the scenes.

Paul was under house arrest in Rome, even though he was innocent. Who was responsible for the mishandling of justice? Who was to blame for the false charges and arrest? There was no question in his mind: "*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:12).

Paul did not point his finger at the Jews in Jerusalem or the soldiers who brought him to Rome. He didn't blame "flesh and blood" people at all. He knew that behind the sufferings which he endured was a diabolical power, the enemy of God Himself. The Apostle John witnessed the same truth portrayed in the book of Revelation. In his vision were swarms of locust rising out of hell, like a cloud of smoke, smothering the earth with false teaching. He saw world governments under the control of their puppet-master, Satan. The message of these visions is clear: our real enemies are spiritual. They are the devil, unbelief, false doctrine, and our own flesh. Each is opposed to the Word becoming fully known.

Yet in spite of the opposition the apostle writes, "*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church*" (Col. 1:24 NIV). Paul was not afraid to stand apart from the common religious ideas of his time, even when it meant suffering because of it. Instead of folding in a heap of self-pity, Paul rejoiced that the afflictions aimed at his Savior were also being aimed at him. When he speaks of filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, he is not implying that the work of redemption is unfinished. The persecutions he faced were mere aftershocks of the earthquake of hatred that was aimed at the Lord Jesus.

Summary: Those who make the Word fully known will suffer. It could be torture, imprisonment, angry words, or dirty looks. It could be that people threaten to push you out of their lives, even as they tried to push Jesus off the cliff. But nothing changes the fact that God charges us with the privilege of sharing the entire Word with the entire world. The enemies we face are always spiritual. Any hostility we endure is really aimed at our Lord. Who knew that better than Paul? On the Damascus road he was not asked, "Why are you persecuting My people?" but "*Why are you persecuting ME?*" The threats, the arrests, the stoning—yes, these were done to Christian people—but they were really done to Christ, who assured us, "*He who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him that sent Me*" (Luke 10:16).

## **II. Making the Word of God fully known while confident of its power**

The battle is spiritual. To engage in a spiritual warfare requires spiritual weapons. "*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

A faithful use of our stewardship means that we trust God's Word to accomplish God's work. Churches rely on plenty of programs to accomplish what only the Word can do. Some confuse or mingle law and gospel. Some place human reason and rationalizations ahead of the Word, thinking they can make it more effective than it is. At times all of us are tempted to couch the law in terms that are less offensive to people, or we are tempted simply to say nothing for

fear of upsetting them. But if we expect God's Word to produce fruit, we had better let that Word speak completely.<sup>4</sup> *"I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints"* (Col. 1:25-26 NIV).

Paul used the word "mystery" in 17 different passages, often with a slightly different twist, yet always with the same basic idea. The mystery of God is not something that people can figure out if they're smart enough. The mystery has to be revealed by God; otherwise, it is not known. *"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit"* (1 Cor. 2:7-10).

### **Making the Word fully known means using the law to expose sin**

Obviously, the gospel of Christ is a mystery to natural man. What about the law of God? Even though the natural law is at work in the hearts of all people, only the Bible reveals the law of God in its fullness. Only Scripture demonstrates that the true God is absolutely, positively holy. He is the holy God who hates sin—not just the sins that the general public condemns—God hates all sin. The morality that a society accepts will never reflect the true holiness and justice of God. Only Scripture presents God as He really is and lays out our natural, woeful condition as it really is.

Scripture abounds with examples to illustrate the spiritual blindness and deadness of natural man. Remember Korah's rebellion? Certain people had foolishly rebelled against God's choice of leadership in Moses. When they refused to repent, God caused the earth to open and to swallow the rebels alive. It was a terrifying sight. Those who saw it trembled for fear. And yet *"on the next day all the congregation of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the Lord'"* (Num. 16:41). How could they do that? How could they possibly forget what had happened to the sons of Korah? That's spiritual blindness, with the sobering aftermath that 14,700 of them were killed by the plague. If one had told Adam on the day before the fall that he would soon be trying to hide from God, he might have laughed out loud. And yet with his sin came spiritual ignorance and death. Israel in the wilderness, the scribes and Pharisees, Judas, the soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb—the list is endless.

Each of us has a sinful flesh that is spiritually blind and dead. It behaves exactly as the Psalmist describes: *"For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin"* (Ps. 36:2 NIV). We have the tendency to magnify specks in the eyes of others and ignore logs in our own. It's our nature. We were born with and still retain this horrible condition.

Sin is not a mere character flaw or blemish that can be fixed. We don't need just to tweak a few things in our lives or give up a few bad habits. We are lost and condemned creatures. Our moral compass was not just a few degrees off; it pointed in the exact opposite direction of God's will. What we need is not a 12-step program or some words of encouragement. We need the Word of God made fully known. Only the law of God can expose our problem for what it really is. Only the Word of God can lead us to say, "My sin is a lot worse than I ever expected!"<sup>5</sup>

Scripture shows that if we violate just one part of one commandment, we are guilty of all. That hardly seems possible. Without the Word telling us, who would ever believe that the sin that flows so naturally from our hearts could wreak such incredible damage? How quickly we pass off our sins as small failings of little consequence, while failing to realize that every individual sin makes us totally guilty of breaking the whole law.<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes people have a problem understanding how Adam and Eve could be driven from the garden and condemned to die, simply for doing what they did. All they did was eat a piece of fruit. No one was killed. No one was defrauded. No one even got hurt. But the Word reveals that their disobedience was an act of rebellion against God. It didn't matter what form

that sin took. The result was the same: they were completely guilty.

I don't remember where I saw it, but the image certainly made an impression. It was a picture that showed the bacteria on a person's hands. A special kind of lighting was used to show exactly where the germs were located. To the naked eye the hands looked clean. Under the special lighting, however, the hands were covered with contamination.

God's law exposes every fault, every mistake, every shortcoming, every failing and weakness. The result is total guilt, total contamination. If we could see things the way God sees them, every one of us would be crying out, "This is worse than I ever thought possible."

Making the Word fully known means using the law of God correctly. Its purpose is not to help people live more Christian lives (pietism), nor is it to save them or bring them under God's favor (Phariseeism). The primary purpose of God's law is *"that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God"* (Rom. 3:19).

### **Making the Word fully known means proclaiming the unconditional gospel**

To do nothing more than proclaim the law, however, would be a horrific violation of making the Word fully known. We have not helped people if we merely show them their sins or coerce them into obedience. Have we really solved anything if we get the unmarried to stop living together but never get around to discussing repentance and God's unmerited forgiveness? Any religion can achieve outward obedience. Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses can do that. But only the gospel can save. Only the unconditional message of Christ's love and grace can lift the burden of sin from our shoulders and set us free to serve God with joyful hearts. The only solution to our problem of total guilt is God's total forgiveness. That forgiveness has already been won for every guilty sinner. This news is so unexpected, so astounding, and so life-changing that it has to be revealed. To culpable sinners, caught dead to rights at the crime scene, the Bible says, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 8:1).

In spite of our rebellion and disobedience, this is the assurance of the complete and permanent removal of all our sin and guilt. In a sinful world there are exceptions to just about everything, but there are no exceptions with God. When He announces that there is no condemnation for those in Christ, realize that this is better than you could possibly imagine. The burden of all guilt is gone; the slightest trace of any sin has been removed. You have, as Jesus promised, already passed from death into life by faith in Him.<sup>7</sup>

In the verses before our section Paul conveyed the wonderful gospel with these words: *"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight"* (Col. 1:21-22).

Imagine being above reproach—not in the sight of friends and family who aren't able to look into your heart, not in the sight of your neighbors or enemies who cannot witness your private words and actions. You are above reproach in the sight of God who sees and knows all things! Point to any moment of any hour of any day of Jesus' life, and what will you find? 100% perfection. There we see complete obedience without even the hint of wrongdoing. Look carefully, because that perfect life is now your life by faith. You are not only acquitted of all wrong, but are declared completely righteous, totally obedient to God in Christ.

It has been said that the difference between man's work and God's work becomes obvious the closer you look at them. The closer you examine man's work, the more flaws you find. The closer you examine God's work, the better and more amazing it is seen to be! This is true of the righteousness that is ours in Christ. The closer you look, the more you realize how bulletproof it really is. There is nothing that can be laid to the charge of those who are covered with it.

The Bible reveals that *"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8). God deals with each of us according to grace; that is, God gives us what we don't deserve. What we deserve is the kind of treatment that the older brother would have recommended for the

prodigal son. What we receive instead is God's immediate and unconditional forgiveness and acceptance.

That's possible, of course, because Jesus lived out God's grace toward each of us. To open the door to the Father, Jesus laid down His innocent life. When He died on the cross, the Father looked down upon the suffering and death of His own Son. When He shouted, "*It is finished!*" the Father was satisfied. His righteous anger over our sins was appeased. And now, though we have been prodigal in our lives and have abandoned Him through our foolish and sinful choices, God rushes to embrace us with the news that our sin and our guilt have been forever taken away.

Making the Word fully known, then, means that we never assume that people know the gospel or tire of hearing it. The gospel is the oxygen that faith breathes. It is the source of our hope, the cause of our joy, and the only message that brings peace with God. It is critical to everything we do as believers in Christ. Too often Christian leaders and churches seek to motivate with law and not gospel. Listen to Christian radio or read the latest Christian how-to book and, sadly, you are likely to find the law being the basis for the Christian life.<sup>8</sup> Motivating with law instead of gospel has been compared to the way batteries are used with a remote control car. You can get the car to move by throwing the batteries at it. Or you can plug the batteries into it as it was designed. Only the gospel can truly motivate us to serve God as He intended and designed us to do. God's love for us is that "perfect love" which "casts out fear," and so "*we love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:18-19).

Summary: Free and full salvation in Christ—this is the precious, powerful message we are privileged to proclaim. It needs no help from us. It requires no slick packaging or well choreographed presentation. It has within itself the power to create and sustain the faith that receives it. It works so well that Jonah ran from sharing it in Nineveh because he anticipated what it would accomplish. It even works when no results are visible to us, such as the 7,000 knees that had not bowed to Baal in the days of Elijah. We can proclaim the law of God and the gospel of Christ with complete confidence that these divine and perfect messages will accomplish the Lord's purposes. And we are to do so with a proper spirit and attitude.

### **III. Making the Word of God fully known in a spirit of humility and gentleness**

In Galatians 6 the apostle sets forth the evangelical spirit in which we are to make the Word fully known. "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted*" (Gal. 6:1).

In making the Word fully known, there is no room for spiritual pride or condescension. People who think they stand eventually fall. Sometimes those who address others about their sins fall into the very evils they condemn. When Jim Bakker's scandalous affair saw the light of day, Jimmy Swaggart stepped up and spoke of removing "this cancer from the body of Christ." He was passionate, pious, and proud. Before long he was caught with a prostitute.

Being responsible stewards of the Word means proclaiming it faithfully, firmly, and lovingly. We are not to look the other way when people are being misled, but are to correct and exhort them with patient instruction and deep concern for their salvation. This may include fellow believers in the congregation. This may include members of our own families. The goal is not to win doctrinal arguments. The goal is to save souls.

*"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry"* (2 Tim. 4:2-5).

*"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if*

anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:12-17).

God have mercy on us if we make the Word fully known for the wrong reason, or do so with an improper attitude, or subtract from what the Scriptures teach, or add to them. May the Word produce within us the gentleness and humility that we need to handle it correctly.

### **Making the Word fully known includes holding fast to pure doctrine**

For a church body that was born on the doctrinal battlefield, it hardly seems necessary to mention the need to remain committed to the doctrine which we have learned. But church history proves otherwise. Apostasy is often a generation away, unless each remains committed to the Scriptures. This is especially true today when Biblical knowledge is so sparse, apostasy is so widespread, and spiritual indifference is so common.

The Bible urges us "to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The doctrine of our church body is not something that we came up with; it is the faith that was delivered once to the disciples. The Lord passed it through them to others and so on down to our present time. The Word is not ours to do with as we please. It contains the mysteries of God that have been revealed for the salvation of sinners. We are simply stewards who are to be faithful with what we have received. God tells us "to contend earnestly." The root word for "contend" is ἀγωνίζομαι (*agonizomai*), from which we get the word "agonize." The reason we are to "agonize over" and "contend for" the one true faith is not because doctrinal correctness saves us. It is because correct doctrine works like the gusset plates on a bridge. What caused the I-35 bridge to collapse were undersized, weakened gusset plates that could no longer support the weight above. Similarly, what causes the spiritual bridge to fall is the state reached when a church's doctrinal position becomes weak and the Word itself is lost. That's the importance of contending for the true faith. That's the importance of making the Word fully known.

Praise God for granting another biennium of His grace and mercy to us in Christ. May He continue to forgive us for all the times when we failed to make His Word fully known or misapplied His law and gospel or presented His truth with the wrong attitude. Let us thank Him for the incredible privilege of being a member of His kingdom by faith and also pray that He preserves His precious Word among us.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The statistics given come from a Barna Research Group poll taken in the 1990's.

<sup>2</sup> "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. . . . Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved." This well-worn statement, wrongly attributed to Martin Luther, is still fitting to many confrontations that believers can expect to face.

<sup>3</sup> It may be better to speak of the *churched* and the *unchurched*, since people are religious by nature.

<sup>4</sup> "Only the Word of God is able to bring a sinner back from the edge of hell. It has done that for each of us. With each case of Christian discipline in the congregation, it is imperative that the Word be brought to bear on the wayward brother's heart" ("The Principles and Practice of Excommunication," *Journal of Theology*, 48:1, p. 41).

<sup>5</sup> The lack of moral sensitivity in America is a reminder that the whole law needs to be revealed. There are many today who say they are Christians but don't understand why it is wrong for unmarried couples to live together, etc.

<sup>6</sup> James 2:10: *Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*

<sup>7</sup> John 5:24: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."*

<sup>8</sup> One example may be "ReignDown USA." This is a national religious movement based on the law rather than the gospel. It urges people to look, not to the Word of God, but into their own hearts. They describe the goal of this movement as "a national movement of repentance and revival in the Body of Christ in the United States. Revival that will break loose in major cities in every corner of the



nation, transforming lives, mending wounded relationships, restoring broken communities, tearing down false idols, and healing a thirsty, disaster-stricken land.” Without the gospel, of course, no true spiritual reformation or revival is possible.

## Exegesis of Galatians 2:11-14

Steven Sippert

The beginning section of Galatians is rather unique in the way Paul has devoted the better part of two chapters to his own history and a defense of his apostolic office. In several of his other New Testament letters he simply mentions the call of his apostleship and addresses his readers accordingly as the Christ-commissioned apostle to the Gentiles. In this letter to the churches of Galatia, however, where the encroachment of the Judaizing errors was taking place and his apostolic authority was apparently being questioned by those who opposed him, he had to defend his divine call as coming directly from Christ and existing independently from that of the other apostles.

In his unpublished commentary on this epistle Ylvisaker notes a progression of thought suggested at one time by Philippi,<sup>1</sup> namely, that in the first two chapters Paul has given three consecutive proofs in his own defense. He truly was an apostle of Christ with apostolic authority *apart from* Peter (1:11-24), together *with* Peter (2:1-10), and even *against* Peter (2:11-14).<sup>2</sup> It is striking to note that after informing his readers of the recognition and sign of partnership that Peter had given him (see Galatians 2:1-10, the apostle to the Jews recognizing the apostle to the Gentiles), Paul then describes a situation in which he had to stand up to Peter and admonish him, Christian to Christian and apostle to apostle. This confrontation in Antioch was yet another reason why the error of the Judaizers had to be rejected and the truth of the gospel upheld both in doctrine and practice.

It is a bit of an open question as to when the Antioch confrontation took place. While it cannot be pinned down with certainty, it seems to follow after Paul’s visit to Jerusalem reported in Galatians 2:1-10. While some would equate Galatians 2:11-21 with Acts 15:1-2, this cannot be determined with absolute certainty either. Given Peter’s fine defense spoken at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:6-11) and the harmony reached through the council’s decrees, it seems unlikely that Peter’s faltering at Antioch would have occurred after that point. It is this writer’s opinion, then, that Peter’s faltering in Antioch took place some time between the mission relief trip Paul made to Jerusalem in Acts 11:27-30 and the arrival of circumcision proponents to Antioch, who said to the Gentile believers there, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

Translation of Galatians 2:11-14: *But when Cephas came to Antioch, to his face I opposed him, because he stood condemned. For before certain men from James came, he would eat with the Gentiles. But when they came, he began withdrawing and separating himself, fearing those of the circumcision group. And also the rest of the Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not walking in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all: “If you, though you are a Jew, are living in a Gentile way and not in a Jewish way, how can you compel the Gentiles to live according to Jewish customs?”*

Verse 11: ***But when Cephas came to Antioch, to his face I opposed him, because he stood condemned.***

Ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν Κηφᾶς εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν It makes little difference whether the Nestle-Aland reading *Cephas* or the Majority Text reading *Peter* is chosen for this verse and also verse 14. Either name expresses the same meaning and applies to the same person.<sup>3</sup> Exactly when Peter’s visit to Antioch took place is not of great importance either. Thus we don’t hear Paul specifically narrowing down a time-frame for this event, as he had done previously in Galatians by accounting for the visits he had made to Jerusalem.

At this point in the history of the New Testament Church, Jerusalem had become the center of Jewish Christianity, while continuing to be the home of the Temple and the center of Judaism. Meanwhile, Syrian Antioch was on its way to becoming a growing center for Gentile Christianity. This large urban area would become the launching point for Paul's missionary tours. The congregation at Syrian Antioch (over 300 miles north of Jerusalem) was at that time a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers. Prior to the famine relief trip which Paul had made with Barnabas (Acts 11:27-30) and Titus (Gal. 2:1-3), Paul and Barnabas had spent an entire year in Antioch, meeting with the congregation and teaching many people. The history recorded in Acts bears out that some contact between the two centers would occur off and on; that is, leaders in Jerusalem would travel to Antioch, and representatives from Antioch would travel to Jerusalem. When the Apostle Peter came to Antioch, he must have stayed long enough to meet the Gentile members and eat with them somewhat regularly. But his evangelically sound and thoroughly scriptural practice would change abruptly when the visitors "from James" arrived.

κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην, ὅτι κατεγνωσμένος ἦν Paul did not ignore what Peter did. Nor did he criticize or accuse him behind his back. Face to face (κατὰ πρόσωπον)<sup>4</sup> he stood up to Peter and opposed what he was doing, as one colleague needing to admonish another. Such face-to-face confrontation was not a ploy by Paul to one-up Peter in front of the others. Rather, it was necessary because of the fact that Peter *stood condemned*.<sup>5</sup> The periphrastic construction here (imperfect ἦν with the perfect passive participle κατεγνωσμένος) is equivalent in force to the pluperfect. Peter's actions and bad example had made him guilty at that point and had put him in a state of condemnation. This was a serious matter, which Paul rightly addressed in a forthright and direct way.

**Verse 12: For before certain men from James came, he would eat with the Gentiles. But when they came, he began withdrawing and separating himself, fearing those of the circumcision group.**

πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἐλθεῖν τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν With the particle γὰρ Paul explains why Peter stood condemned. When the eyes of others from Jerusalem were not upon him, when it was simply he and Paul and Barnabas and the members of the Antioch congregation, he repeatedly or routinely (note the imperfect verb συνήσθιεν) practiced fellowship with the Gentile members, and at the agape meals he would eat whatever they brought, even if it was food not allowed by the Law of Moses. But his attitude and practice changed when men "from James" had joined the gathering. The position of the phrase ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου right after τινὰς (rather than before or right after the verb ἐλθεῖν) seems to indicate that these men had some association with the Apostle James mentioned earlier in Galatians 2:9. Peter and Paul knew who they were. To Paul their presence or absence made no difference in the way fellowship was to be expressed in this congregation and in the way unity was to be maintained between Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ. But Peter reacted differently and wrongly, in that he stopped sitting with and eating with the Gentile members.

ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον ὑπέστειλεν καὶ ἀφώριζεν ἑαυτὸν φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς Again take note of the imperfect verbs ὑπέστειλεν<sup>6</sup> and ἀφώριζεν, which indicate that what Peter did in withdrawing himself from the Gentiles was in some way an ongoing thing, not a one-time occurrence. And his separation from these Christian brethren was done in fear of what the "circumcision group" would think or say.

I have translated τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς somewhat freely and interpretively. Literally the words mean "the ones of circumcision." We find the same wording in Acts 11:2, which reports that Peter was confronted in Jerusalem by "those of the circumcision" (οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς), who contended with him by saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them" (Acts 11:3). Given that the circumstances involved and the Greek words used are so similar, it seems likely that τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς was not another way of saying "Jewish people." Notice how Paul used Ἰουδαῖοι (Gal. 2:13) in reference to the Jews present at Antioch. Peter knew from experience that his actions outside of Jerusalem were subject to scrutiny and criticism. Even if these men from James were

not themselves part of the vocal and persistent supporters of circumcision, they might share information which those of that group could use in protest against him, even as they had done in Acts 11. It's possible that the men he feared in Galatians 2:12 were the same as the ones in Acts 11:2-3, and perhaps the same as or associated with the circumcision advocates who came to Antioch in Acts 15:1. Given the scant amount of information available, however, one hesitates to press these suggestions any further.

Of greater note and importance is the Bible's record of showing how God's people and God's representatives fell into sin, needed His constant forgiveness, and continually depended on His grace. The Bible does not gloss over or whitewash the human weakness and sinful conduct of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, and in this instance, Peter. Though he was a leading apostle of the New Testament Church, though he had the Lord's promise of the Spirit to guide him into knowing and teaching all truth, he himself was not infallible in his decisions or continually righteous in his actions. As the event in Antioch proves, he did not always practice what should have been done to live in true accord with the gospel. Even worse, his actions became a bad example that many others there would follow.

***Verse 13: And also the rest of the Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.***

καὶ συνυπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι. When the men from James arrived in Antioch and joined in the gathering of the congregation, Peter stopped his previous fellowship practices with the Gentile members. Other Jewish believers in Antioch, including Barnabas, followed suit. Peter's reverse course of action carried some weight with them. They joined him in reverting to the old covenant way of separating from Gentile people and not eating the unclean foods which the Gentile members had brought to the gathering. Perhaps the Jewish men deemed it right because the Apostle Peter was doing it. Whatever the rationale might have been, Paul identified it for the sin it was: the sin of hypocrisy. This passage helps to illustrate that hypocrisy is not limited to that well known and often used description "unbelievers who pretend to be believers." Believers fall into hypocrisy too, whenever they pretend to be something which they are not. Peter and the Jews in Antioch<sup>7</sup> were pretending to be followers of the old covenant ways, but only in deference to the Jewish men from Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

ὥστε καὶ Βαρναβᾶς συναπήχθη αὐτῶν τῇ ὑποκρίσει. Paul mentioned Barnabas' involvement for more than one reason. Not only was he known to the Galatian Christians, but he was also Paul's close companion and partner in the gospel ministry. The wave of hypocrisy was so strong that it even swept away Barnabas, who was "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24). The construction of the clause as ὥστε with an indicative verb is used to emphasize that this result actually happened. This particular construction occurs only twice in the New Testament.<sup>9</sup>

***Verse 14: But when I saw that they were not walking in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all: "If you, though you are a Jew, are living in a Gentile way and not in a Jewish way, how can you compel the Gentiles to live according to Jewish customs?"***

ἀλλ' ὅτε εἶδον ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθοποδοῦσιν πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. It is clear from the context that εἶδον has the 1<sup>st</sup> singular ending rather than the 3<sup>rd</sup> plural. Paul was there to know how Peter acted before and after the visitors from Jerusalem arrived. He saw how the other Jews at Antioch were eating with their fellow Gentile members one day and sitting on the other side of the room the next, that is, after they noticed what Peter was doing. The hypocritical change of practice was more than a lie. It was potentially offensive and damaging to the Gentile believers. What were they supposed to think about all this? Should they feel like second-class Christians because they weren't circumcised or living as followers of the old covenant? Even worse, was their faith in Christ not enough? Something had to be said, for the actions of Peter and the other Jews did not follow in line (ὀρθοποδέω)<sup>10</sup> with the truth expressed in the gospel.

εἶπον τῷ Κηφᾷ ἔμπροσθεν πάντων The same manuscripts which have Πέτρος in verse 11 have τῷ Πέτρῳ here. The article (with either reading) points to the apostle mentioned before in chapters 1 and 2, the same apostle who “seemed to be a pillar” and had given Paul the right hand of fellowship. Paul not only confronted his fellow apostle; he did so in front of all present. He admonished Peter publicly, for Peter’s unscriptural actions had taken place publicly and had involved both an offense to the Gentiles and a misleading of the Jews. Paul carried out what sound pastoral theology still advocates today: public sin should be handled with public admonition. Cf. 1 Timothy 5:20: “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.”

εἰ σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων ἐθνικῶς καὶ οὐχὶ Ἰουδαϊκῶς ζῆς, πῶς<sup>11</sup> τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις ἰουδαίζειν;  
I chose to render the adverbs and the infinitive of this verse as follows:

ἐθνικῶς *in a Gentile way,*

Ἰουδαϊκῶς *in a Jewish way,*

ἰουδαίζειν *to live according to Jewish customs.*

Perhaps the infinitive form is the textual basis for the term extensively used in reference to the false teachers present in Galatia. They were doing intentionally and doctrinally what Peter had done in weakness, but nevertheless in practice: they were “Judaizing.” Hence, for the lack of a better term, the name “Judaizers” has stuck and seems appropriate.

In regard to Peter’s actions and Paul’s admonition thereof, a quotation from Koehler’s commentary is to the point:

Paul pointed out to Peter the contradiction in his action. First of all, Peter was *a Jew*. For him, therefore, there would be some sense, as in Jerusalem, in still *living as a Jew*, i.e., in still observing the regulations of the Mosaic Law. But he had *lived as a Gentile*. He had not been afraid of the supposed pollution through association with the Gentiles and through eating of the food which they had brought along to the love-feasts. How could he now expect Gentiles, for whom this made no sense at all, to live as Jews? For so much they had to conclude from his actions that the Jewish way was a superior or better way, indeed, the only right way. Just the fact that Peter, the *Jew*, had the correct understanding makes his action so evil in misleading the poor *Gentiles*, who had received the Gospel from the Jews.<sup>12</sup>

There is some debate as to where Paul’s speech at Antioch comes to an end in chapter two, and consequently how to punctuate the affected verses in translation. Did Paul only say verse 14 to Peter? Does his speech not also include verses 15 and 16 and even extend all the way to verse 21, as indicated in the closed quotation marks of many English translations?

In answer to the questions above we find the remarks of Prof. Kuehne to be helpful. In his class notes for the seminary exegesis course that he taught on Galatians, he writes:

How much of this section did Paul address to Peter at Antioch? I would suggest all of it. For if Paul’s rebuke included only vs. 14, it would have ended rather abruptly. Furthermore, the first clear indication of a change in the persons Paul is addressing comes in 3:1.

It is to be recognized, of course, that this section probably represents a summary of what Paul actually said to Peter. It serves, also, as a fitting transition from chapters 1-2, where Paul has defended his apostolic authority, to chapters 3-4, where he will be defending his doctrine.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Adolf Philippi was a Jewish convert to confessional Lutheranism, whose German commentary on Galatians is the source of Ylvisaker's quotation.

<sup>2</sup> "The Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians," Joh. Ylvisaker, trans. C. M. Gullerud, *Journal of Theology*, 33:3, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Cephas* is the Aramaic word for "stone," and *Petros* is the Greek word for "rock" or "stone." See John 1:42, Mark 3:16, and Matt. 16:18.

<sup>4</sup> This phrase is also emphatic by virtue of its position at the beginning of the main clause.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Friberg lexicon (available electronically on BibleWorks), *καταγινώσκω* denotes the "accurate detection of evil in oneself or someone else" and can be translated *condemn*, *declare to be wrong*, or *judge to be guilty*.

<sup>6</sup> The Louw-Nida lexicon offers this definition for *ὑποστέλλω*: "to hold oneself back from doing something, with the implication of some fearful concern."

<sup>7</sup> Paul's description, οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι, could refer to the Jewish members of the Antioch church and other Jewish visitors who, prior to Peter's change of conduct, had been eating with the Gentiles too. Imagine being in the position of that Gentile believer who for several days had Jewish believers sitting at the table with him, only to find those same people keeping their distance and refusing to eat his home-cooked pork.

<sup>8</sup> In Peter's case the withdrawal from the Gentiles could have been somewhat influenced by his knowledge of how the Jewish Christians had to behave in Jerusalem. In the very heart of Judaism at that time, where the lifestyle of the old covenant was alive and well, the Jerusalem congregation had to be careful not to offend Jewish sensitivities and cause the gospel of Christ to be misconstrued as contrary to the Law of Moses.

<sup>9</sup> The other occurrence is John 3:16. Typically, the idea of either intended or actual result was expressed with *ὥστε* and the *infinitive*. Context would have to indicate if the result was merely intended or actually realized. However, when the context required it, *ὥστε* followed by the *indicative* (which is usually inferential in force) would guarantee and emphasize that the result actually did happen. This construction, though very rare, was still viable in the Koine period.

<sup>10</sup> Lit. "to walk straight"—to *act rightly*, to *be straightforward*.

<sup>11</sup> The Majority Text has *τί* (*why*) instead of *πῶς* (*how*).

<sup>12</sup> *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, Joh. Ph. Koehler, trans. E. E. Sauer, NPH, 1957, p. 61. Emphasis in italics is either by the author or by the translator.

## **The Purpose of Excommunication as Demonstrated in the Church at Corinth**

Paul Tiefel, Jr.

In the previous issue of the *Journal* we took the opportunity to review what the Bible teaches about the principles and practice of church discipline and especially its final step, excommunication. In this installment it is our intent to follow up with an examination of an actual case of excommunication recorded in Scripture and how it demonstrates the saving purpose which the Lord has in mind for the recovery of souls caught up in manifest impenitence.

We have already seen how the phrase "put out of the synagogue" can be in reference to excommunication.<sup>1</sup> The Savior foretold how Christians would suffer such excommunication for His sake (John 16:2). And we have the example of how the religious leaders used the threat of excommunication inappropriately in their attempts to silence the truth about Jesus (John 9:22). None of these examples, of course, conforms to what Jesus prescribed for His Church in Matthew 18. Nevertheless, in the rest of the New Testament we do find a case of a proper excommunication carried out by a Christian congregation. In this lone example the New Testament reader is privileged to be taken full circle by the Spirit of God: from the specific need for excommunication to the proper response by the Christian congregation to the desired and hoped-for outcome actually taking place. Using the pertinent texts found in 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Corinthians 2, we take a closer look at this case of Christian soul care as it occurred in the Corinthian congregation.

### **The problem addressed by the Apostle Paul**

***1 Corinthians 5:1-2 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.***

There were actually two related problems going on in the Corinthian congregation. One of the members was sinning openly and impenitently. His sin involved unlawful sexual relations. Because of the manner of expression used, "his father's wife," it is generally thought that he was involved with his step-mother, maybe his father's second wife, rather than his own mother. Regardless of the woman's identity, one clear problem to address was this member's sinful action and his attitude toward it.

Problem number two was even more serious. The other members of the congregation had adopted an indifferent attitude toward the one living in sin. Some of them perhaps had fallen for that off-repeated mantra in our day: whatever two adults consent to do, as long as it doesn't harm anybody else, is of no concern to others. No doubt, a mantra inspired by the father of lies, the devil. Whatever the reason was in their hearts and minds, a lack of concern had replaced Christian love for one another. Every sin of a fellow member is to be of great and godly concern to his brothers. Sin and specifically impenitence over sin will separate a soul from the living, holy God, that is, if it is left unchecked. The *only* remedy is a repentant return to the cross of Christ and His cleansing blood. With that critical truth in mind, how can Christians stand by and do nothing when a fellow member is on fire, so to speak, suffering great damage to his faith in Jesus!

For an example of the opposite and right way to handle the sin of a fellow Christian, see the godly reaction of Ezra (Ezra 9 and 10), who responded with tears (note his mourning in 9:3) and his intercessory prayer. What should the Corinthian Christians do for their fellow member?

### **The solution to be carried out in the Corinthian congregation**

**1 Corinthians 5:3-5 *For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.***

When the Word of God has judged, then the child of God is to follow suit and echo that judgment of God. Yes, it is true that our Savior instructed us not to judge (Matt. 7:1-2). We are not to be judgmental of others, but rather kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving to one another (Eph. 4:32). We can not read hearts and should not try. The kind of judgment that the Savior forbids occurs when we try to enter areas reserved for God alone, for example, the area of hypocrisy or the eternal destination of individual people. But in all areas where God has revealed His judgment on a matter, we are to be quick to concur and bold to confess to others what He has determined for all. Such areas include God's judgment of what is a sin, His verdict of just and proper punishment, His prescribed remedy for sin confessed, and His determination of true doctrine that is to be taught by His Church. God reveals all this clearly in the Bible, and so when the Word of God judges, the child of God will likewise judge accordingly.

Hence Paul says in verse 3, "I have already judged," and urges the Christians in Corinth to join him in a congregational judgment (vv. 4-5 and vv. 12-13) that simply reflects what God Himself has determined about this matter. God's Word has issued the judgment that it is sinful for a man to have sexual relations with his father's wife. So says Leviticus 18:8: "*The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness.*" Cf. also Deuteronomy 22:30.

In fact, the natural law at work in man's heart from creation tells even those without the Word (e.g., pagan Gentiles in this text) that such a relationship is wrong. God, not man, sets the moral principle. He makes and has made the judgment call. And surely the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased with His bitter sufferings and death full forgiveness for such immorality. Yet that forgiveness remains a liberation from sin, not a freedom to sin. For that reason the same Lord Jesus Christ has established the ministry of forgiveness whereby He has entrusted to His believers the keys of His kingdom, namely, the special authority to forgive the sins of the

penitent and to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

Paul's judgment was not simply that the man was committing this particular sin, but that by his attitude he was also impenitent. So he advances the issue of soul care beyond his own judgment to a call for corporate action. Note the directive in verse 4: "when you are gathered together" and the other modifying phrases in verses 4-5: **"In the name of our Lord Jesus . . . with the power of our Lord Jesus . . . in the day of the Lord Jesus."**

There is to be no judgment based on personal opinion. There is no room, on the one hand, for the indifferent attitude displayed by the Corinthian Christians up to this point. Nor is there room for a personal vendetta or witch-hunt. This action is demanded by and is to be carried out in the "name of the Lord Jesus." His Word is the standard for them to apply in this matter. And He Himself supplies the power and authority for them to act. His mighty triumph over sin and death (1 Cor. 15:56-57) and His thunderous head-stomping defeat of Satan (Gen. 3:15, Heb. 2:14) have resulted in God the Father committing to Jesus all authority to judge (John 5:22, 26-27). Jesus in turn has sent His followers out into the world with the ministry of the keys that He gave them when He said: **"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"** (John 20:21-23).

Paul calls the Christian congregation to action. Do what Jesus wants done! In accord with His Word and empowered by Him, "deliver such a one to Satan" (v. 5). Turn the key and lock the door to heaven. Announce to this impenitent man that his sins are not forgiven but retained (held in place). Tell him that he is no longer a brother in Christ, but is an unbeliever (Matt. 18:17), for his manifest impenitence can only be indicative of unbelief.

Yet along with that prescribed action comes the express purpose: **"for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."** The purpose of excommunication is to crush the flesh, which has gained the upper hand and has caused the person's fall from faith. The flesh has flared up in open rebellion to a command of God, has fanned that sin into stubborn impenitence, and, undoubtedly aided by Satan, has deluded the sinner into thinking that all of this is okay with God. One purpose of the excommunication, then, is to hit the impenitent right between the eyes with God's clear verdict: "You belong to Satan, not to Me!" But an additional, corresponding purpose is the urgent underscoring of the repentance necessary to bring about a return to the cleansing fountain of the Savior's blood and, finally, eternal salvation for the individual before the Savior's return.

Does God want this immoral man saved? Absolutely! How then can the child of God be indifferent to this lost sinner who had been his brother?

Before we move on in this compelling account, we take a moment to note a particular distinction that Paul makes. Only a Christian church can excommunicate. Paul can and does express his personal judgment of the case, as we hear in verse 3. But he follows the guidelines established by the Savior in Matthew 18:15-18 and refers the final step of excommunication to the church in its proper assembly. A child of God can always declare the Word of God to others. Surely he must preach the law of God to the unrepentant and declare the binding of sins as well as the forgiving of sins, as conditions warrant. But only a Christian church can excommunicate, i.e., declare the one-time brother now to be outside the pale of the Holy Christian Church. That authority has not been given to an apostle, much less to a pastor, board of elders, or church council.

### **The danger of loveless indifference**

**1 Corinthians 5:6-8: Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

This action was called for by the Word of God and failure to act was in itself a sin. We have already noted how the proper attitude was to be one of mourning (v. 2) over the sin of a fellow member. Indifference to the spiritual welfare of other members is actually a form of pride. Pride, perhaps, in the sense that we claim to know a better way to handle sin than the method prescribed by Jesus (Matt. 18:15-17). Pride, maybe, in the sense that a sin, especially a sin in another person's life, is no big deal, even though God has said the opposite. Pride also in the sense that if I turn a blind eye to yours, you will do the same toward mine. Or it's a Pharisaic pride that leads members to "thank God that I'm not like that guy living with his father's wife."

Whatever the specific boast or wrongful assumption, Paul declares plainly that it is not good. He goes on to show how infectious such an attitude can be and how it will spread and explode into increasing evil and malice. Sin certainly has a domino effect. When I sin, my flesh and the devil conspire to multiply that sin into more of the same. In the case of Judas, for example, stealing from the disciples' treasury led to a love for more money in place of honoring Jesus (John 12:3-8), which led to a devilish bargain for betrayal, which finally led to unbelieving despair and suicide. Similarly, there is the potential for sin's domino effect to run its course in my life, as one sin leads to another. But beyond that my sin can also have a domino effect throughout the congregation. If my sin is seen by others, then what? Will my bad example induce others down the same path? Will the rumor mill crank up and stories be spread here and there? Will my fellow believers be loveless and indifferent and turn a blind eye to my sin? Any of these results in more sin done by others.

Paul points to the only solution that can stop the domino effect in my life and that of the church. "*Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us*" (v. 7). With this rich statement of gospel truth we are taken back to the Old Testament and also brought forward into the New Testament, as we are reminded of God's one way for all time to handle all sin: *Christ crucified* as promised. His holy life exchanged for our sinful lives. His death (physical and eternal) in place of our death. God's verdict of guilty on His Son so that the verdict of not guilty would be declared on the whole world. The only way to stop the dominoes of sin from falling is the cross of Christ. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast* (Eph. 2:8-9).<sup>2</sup>

We note finally in this part of Paul's exhortation that purging sin and its prideful boasting will do away with the spiritual leaven of "malice and wickedness" and instead bring forth what God wants for His people: "sincerity and truth" in their hearts and in their midst.

### **The proper setting for excommunication**

**1 Corinthians 5:9-12 *I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?***

Paul knows the tendency of the human spirit to go to extremes. From the indifference over the sin of a fellow believer, it would be only too easy for the Corinthian Christians to overextend the Bible truth of excommunication to the ungodly of the world, those outside the church. So Paul takes a moment to clarify. Excommunication is intended only for one "who is named a brother" (v. 11), even as our Savior opened the section in Matthew 18:15-17 with the words "if your brother sins against you." It is obvious that the word "brother" in both cases refers to a brother in the Christian faith, one who confesses faith in Christ, and is not restricted to a brother in the sense of a relative.

A chief concern of Jesus and Paul is that a person may be deceived into thinking that he or she is in the Church of Christ, when in fact sin and impenitence have replaced actual faith. It



is to address this potential problem of self-deception that God established and revealed the practice of excommunication. The church of God is to follow the Word of God and let the impenitent member who thinks he is a child of God know the truth that he belongs instead to Satan. It goes without saying that one who is outside of the church may also be guilty of self-deceptions, but belonging to the Church of Christ is not one of them.

This principle helps us also to understand that when a member quits his membership while under discipline, the congregational steps of church discipline have to cease. That member has ended the relationship, and thus the responsibility given by God to a Christian congregation ends as well. It may very well be that the member who has quit is indeed not a member of Christ's Holy Church, and we can state as much both personally and as a congregation. But we are unable to take the final step of excommunication, not only because we can't follow through to the end the Savior's instructions in Matthew 18:15-17, but also because the person is no longer one who is "named a brother."

This principle of dealing only with those who are in our fellowship also explains why we do not excommunicate those of a different fellowship. Just as we do not apply the term "brother"—namely, a fellow Christian confessing the truth—to those of a heterodox fellowship, so we have no call or authority to exercise Christian discipline over them. It would be a gross violation of God's Word to try to excommunicate whole fellowships or groups of professing Christians or to insist that every one who confesses a false teaching must be an unrepentant sinner outside of the Holy Christian Church.

It has been said above, but it bears repeating that the child of God has been sent by Christ to preach the Word of God and administer the keys to every other human being, as he is able. Just as we are to share the joy of forgiveness in Christ with the repentant sinner, so we are to warn of the sorrow and death that accompanies the unrepentant sinner who remains impenitent. Therefore it is proper for you and me as individuals to bring the appropriate messages of law and gospel to:

- the next-door neighbor who is living outside of God's Word,
- the Baptist friend who is in danger because of false teaching,
- the member who quits while being disciplined,
- the relative who no longer attends church,
- the stranger encountered on a plane trip.

Sometimes the key given by Christ will be used to declare the gates of heaven opened through sins forgiven, and sometimes the declaration will be that the gates are closed through sins retained. These two uses of the keys are to be part of our daily life as individual witnesses of Christ and His Word. But the Lord has also revealed a use of the keys only for a group of believers and has specified excommunication as an act carried out only by believers gathered together (1 Cor. 5:4) as the church (Matt. 18:17).

### **A summary of the principle involved**

**1 Corinthians 5:13 *But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."***

The final verse of the chapter repeats the principle which God has established for His people to apply. God alone is the Judge. He will take care of dealing with all those outside our fellowship and all those outside the Christian faith. He has, however, commissioned us to uphold certain privileges and responsibilities for those within our fellowship. He wants us to share with each other His judgment. Much of the time we share the astounding and awe-inspiring judgment rendered in Christ's death, His liberating and life-giving verdict of NOT GUILTY. But if impenitence manifests itself in the life of anyone in our fellowship, we are to mourn and grieve, displaying an attitude which reflects also God's concern. And in Christian love for the impenitent person and in accord with the Word of God, we are to relay His judgment, which in this case is the serious and sorrowful verdict that he or she is guilty by reason of abandoning Christ.

However, as we see from the example in Corinth, the Holy Spirit was not done with His blessed work in the heart and life of this impenitent man. For him and everyone like him the Spirit has more in mind than the mere confrontation and condemnation of impenitent unbelief.

### **A blessed outcome**

**2 Corinthians 2:5-8 *But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.***

1 Corinthians 5:5 makes it clear that the purpose of a proper excommunication is to rescue the sinner from his impenitence and restore him in a true relationship with the Lord Jesus before it's too late. While this is not always the outcome that occurs, it did apparently happen in the Corinthian congregation.<sup>3</sup>

Paul reminds the Christians then and now that the sin of the unrepentant was a cause of grief for all the fellowship. The excommunication, a most serious use of the law of God and one to be used only by the believers as a group, had its God-intended effect. It crushed the sinner in his guilt. Consequently, it was now time to use the gospel of forgiveness in Christ and turn the key in the opposite direction, to open again the gate of heaven for this man who had now become repentant.

We see the tender heart of a Christian pastor at work. Paul was concerned that the sinner not be left only at a sincere sorrow over his sin. It would not take much for Satan to overwhelm him with guilt over the sin of sexual involvement with his father's wife (even the heathen don't do that!) and also with shame over having it known throughout the congregation. The only way to keep the sinner from being swallowed whole is to rush in with the gospel of forgiveness in Christ for every sin. Only He has turned the tables on Satan, who as a roaring lion seeks to swallow us. This victory the Savior has accomplished by His death, which has swallowed up our death. Guilt and shame must yield to Him, who has the nail prints and pierced side to evidence the exchange of His righteousness for our unrighteousness. This gospel, which brings life and joy to the child of God daily, now needed to be poured out on the repentant sinner at Corinth. Without it there would be only despair over sin leading to death.

Let us pray without ceasing that those souls who are excommunicated in our assemblies are likewise restored to faith before their time of grace has come to an end.

### **Following the Word of God to avoid extremes**

**2 Corinthians 2:9-11 *For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.***

For the child of God it is a constant challenge to maintain proper balance. Satan is crafty and seeks to throw us into the ditch on either of side of God's truth. In 1 Corinthians we see that one ditch involved no concern for and no action taken for an unrepentant member, while the other ditch involved the idea of excommunicating unrepentant non-members. Here in 2 Corinthians 2 Paul addresses the proper attitude toward the repentant sinner and the need to avoid on the one side the ditch of indifference and on the other side the ditch of a hardened, unforgiving spirit.

The Christians at Corinth had proved obedient in following Christ's loving directives for soul-care as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. In a congregational gathering they had

excommunicated the unrepentant sinner from their fellowship. But now continued obedience to the Word of God directed the use of the same keys but in the opposite way: announcing forgiveness to the repentant sinner and opening the gates of heaven to him. No longer was he to be delivered over to Satan, but treated once again as a child of God (1 Cor. 5:5) and a fellow brother in Christ. Thus Paul agrees personally with the course of action so far, but urges one more important measure for the eternal welfare of this man.

When excommunication is properly done, the intended outcome can actually take place as it did in Corinth. The excommunicated person can be jolted out of his self-delusion, confronted with his guilt, and led to repent of all his sins, including the one which occasioned his impenitence.

Once the “destruction of the flesh” has happened and the grip of impenitence is broken, the congregation needs to remember the “devices”<sup>4</sup> of Satan when they act in love and reassure the penitent person that in Christ his sins are forgiven both by God and by them. Satan has a definite mindset, a basic thought process which determines his way of operating, and we should not be ignorant of it. Scripture reveals a crafty and malicious mindset at work in describing the devil as:

- A fallen angel in hateful opposition to God,
- Mankind’s chief spiritual enemy,
- A mass-murderer of souls,
- A liar and deceiver,
- Able and willing to twist Scripture for his own malevolent purposes (see above for examples of his deceptive ditch of error on either side of the truth),
- Employer and energizer of the Antichrist, that visible agent of his at work in the visible church,
- The prince of this world,
- The one who once held us in the grip of eternal death.<sup>5</sup>

This Satan and his “devices” continually put Christian members and congregations to the test of whether they will be obedient to the Word. It is the Word of God alone that is able to reveal Satan and his mindset. It is the Word of God alone that is able to put Satan to rout. The topic of church discipline (Christian discipline), including excommunication, is a Bible teaching, and as a proclamation of God’s truth it is one of many teachings where Satan will try to promote disobedience to God in one form or another. May the Spirit of God bless each of us, each of our congregations, and also our synod with forgiveness for past and present failures and with renewed zeal to follow the Word of God in this crucial matter of soul care. Only then can we seek that outcome given by the Spirit and found only in Jesus: the recovery of lost souls and the restoration of our fallen brothers.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> We also recognize the limits of such a reference. What the Jewish leaders were doing in their synagogues at that time was not what God decreed for His New Testament people. Nevertheless, in those instances where removal from the synagogue was done properly, we can see a correlation with what the Lord prescribed as Christian discipline under the old covenant. **It’s interesting to note that more than one Bible student, including Martin Luther, has found the concept of excommunication in the Old Testament use of the phrase “cut off from the people.”** See Gen. 17:14; Exod. 12:15; Lev. 7:20-27, 17:4, 17:9-10, 17:14, 18:29; Num. 15:30; and many others.

<sup>2</sup> Consider also the foundation that Paul has laid in 1 Corinthians 1-4, whereby he rules out a boasting by man in man and holds up Christ as the only object in which to glorify. 1 Cor. 1:30-31 especially comes to mind: “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let Him glory in the LORD.’”

<sup>3</sup> Based on a number of considerations drawn from both epistles, it is assumed that 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Corinthians 2 are referring to the same matter. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul exhorts the congregation to handle the man according to his state of impenitence, and in 2 Corinthians 2 according to his state of repentance.

<sup>4</sup> Used as a noun, νοήματα occurs six times in the New Testament, several of which are in a negative context, and is translated with the word “mind” for plural forms and “thought” for the singular. Cf. 2 Cor. 10:5 for usage in the singular and 2 Cor. 3:14, 4:4, and 11:3 for Paul’s usage in the plural. Νόημα has the same root as the verb νοέω (used 14 times in the NT), which expresses the basic

concept of *perceiving* or *understanding*. In accepting the translation of 2 Cor. 2:11 as “devices,” one can recognize that the noun form may mean “purposes conceived by thinking, *design, scheme*” and used “in a bad sense, can mean “*stratagem, plot*” (Friberg Lexicon).

<sup>5</sup> For more on who Satan is and what he can do, see former *Journal* articles “An Overview of the Origin of Satan” (Dec. 2004) and “The Allowed Activities of Satan” (Mar. 2005).

## **Elijah’s Mantle: *Of Pericopes and Paraments***

Paul Tiefel, Jr.

\* As indicated in the subtitle above, this third installment in the series “Elijah’s Mantle” will briefly treat two topics of practical importance for the parish pastor. The first topic, “Of Pericopes,” is offered with an appendix at the end of the article.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Of Pericopes***

“I don’t like going to church; the pastor is always preaching about \_\_\_\_\_.” If the blank filled in by the member is something other than sin and grace and the crucified Christ, then the problem is with the preacher and not the hearer. It’s a potential problem for all in the preaching ministry, for it raises important perennial questions. How does a pastor preach week after week without repeating himself or running out of material? How does a pastor keep from preaching a few specific teachings? How does he avoid dwelling on his favorite doctrines or preaching his pet concerns or hammering his hearers with his limited perception of what they need? Thankfully, help can be found in the diligent use of sermon text pericopes.

Derived from the Greek, the word *pericope* means the “act of cutting out” or “circumscribed portion” and refers to the extraction of Bible verses for corporate use in the worship service. The basic concept of the pericopes is to provide a series of texts from the Bible that cover all the basic teachings of God’s Word in a year. It thereby serves as a safeguard to keep the preacher from selecting sermon texts that only cover his favorite topics.

Several sources for pericopes are available to the preacher. The faithful standby from the old days—but no longer in print—is Paul W. Nesper’s *Biblical Texts* (Augsburg Publishing House). Published more recently and available from Northwestern Publishing House is *Sermon Texts*, edited by Ernst H. Wendland.<sup>2</sup> Both volumes contain a variety of older and newer pericopes, and also a listing of suggested texts for special occasions that typically arise in a congregation’s ministry (e.g., confirmation, marriages, funerals, dedications, church anniversaries, and the like). One can also find the historic pericopes<sup>3</sup> listed with the corresponding Introits, Collects, and Graduals in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

Similar to one’s approach with Bible study, pericopes are generally developed according to two methodologies; one can follow a method that is more deductive or more inductive. A deductive approach makes the Bible be the starting point and lets the passages reveal the teachings (doctrines) of God in their original settings. An inductive approach starts with a Bible teaching (doctrine) and gathers the *sedes doctrinae*, the principal passages of Scripture which expound the chosen topic.

Using the inductive or topical approach, preacher and hearer (or teacher and student) can choose a topic (e.g., end of the world, resurrection, prayer, etc.) and set forth a series of pertinent Bible passages for preaching or study. Much of our approach to Bible study and instruction is arranged in such a topical manner. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism with a detailed explanation, either by Gausewitz, Sydow, or someone else, conforms to a topical approach, as do many adult classes and instruction manuals. Similarly, sermon texts for the festival half of the church year—Christmas, with its preparatory season of Advent, on down through Easter to Pentecost and Trinity—certainly lend themselves to an inductive and historical study of doctrinally fundamental topics, like Messianic prophecy, the virgin birth of Christ, vicarious atonement, and the Lord’s resurrection and ascension. Most pericopes will then follow the festival part of the church year with topical texts chosen for the non-festival portion—what are commonly designated as Sundays after Pentecost or Sundays after Trinity.

Yet an equally valid approach is to work through books of the Bible in their given order and develop a series of texts that cover the whole Bible in a natural rather than topical way. This approach is refreshing, for it allows Bible doctrine to unfold from its original setting. It supplies the narrow and broad context to those passages which have often been heard and memorized outside of their location in Scripture.

Only a few of the more recently published pericopes offer a listing of texts that sequentially work through a chosen biblical book or at least a portion of a book.<sup>4</sup> A number of more comprehensive pericopes have been developed by CLC pastors and are arranged with one of the following formats:

- A two-and-one-half-year study through the entire Bible (note: while the gospel is certainly found throughout the Old and New Testaments, this approach has the disadvantage of having a rather long string of Old Testament sermons);
- A one-year study through the Bible;
- A study through the book of Acts with a chronological placement of the Epistles;
- A study of the life of Christ, using a harmony of the Gospels;
- A study of the book of Revelation.

For a detailed example of a one-year "Through the Bible" series, see the appendix at the end of the article.

Often these Bible-book series will have the Scripture readings coordinated with the sermon text, so as to give more of a flavor of the book under study, and even combine the service texts with a listing of daily readings recommended for the members' study at home. In addition, this kind of series can also be coupled with a more in-depth study of the featured book in the congregation's Bible Class.

The reaction to the congregational use of such a series has been positive in the experience of those who have used them. So much of our Bible study is driven by a topical approach that a different format is generally welcomed as both refreshing and beneficial. Whichever approach is used, a pericopal series of some kind is instrumental in carrying out the pastor's charge to preach the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). It helps the pastor avoid preaching one predominant topic of concern or interest. It provides the road map for a thought-out and well-rounded study of God's Word. And on occasion when a member suggests that a certain text was picked with him or her in mind (either with good or bad implications), it is a comfort for the preacher simply to point to the pericope as the predetermined means which provided the text.

If the preacher chooses to use a more traditional (historical-topical) pericope, one which offers three or more suggested texts from both Testaments, he has the advantage of built-in biblical variety. In working through such a series, he can stick with a set rotation of texts to use for the sermon. For example, in a three-Sunday cycle that repeats throughout the course of the church year, he can preach the designated Old Testament text first, then the Gospel text one week later, then the Epistle text after that, and so forth. This kind of rotation would help the preacher to move around in the Bible and keep him somewhat in touch with the Hebrew of the Old Testament. On a given Sunday the other texts not up for use in the pulpit would ordinarily make good selections for the service's Scripture readings.

A final comment on the use of pericopes is in order. They can still be abused by the pastor if he reads into the text his preconceived notions. As with any sermon text regardless of its pericopal source, the sound advice from homiletics class still applies.

- > Before crafting theme and parts, develop the whole text exegetically.
- > Let God speak first to the preacher in the text before he speaks for God to the congregation.
- > Unfold the beauty, admonition, and comfort that are unique to each text.

### ***Of Paraments***

Paraments should be a helpful support and aid to our preaching and worship. In fact, from time to time a series of sermons on their meaning would be beneficial for the congregation, especially the children. In the Old Testament God had ordered the worship life of His people so that a number of visually-based opportunities were there for the younger generation to ask, "What does this mean?" We think of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, the Passover lamb, the twelve stones from the Jordan River, the covenant of circumcision, the Sabbath Day, the regulation regarding clean and unclean animals, the jar of manna, the Ark of the Covenant, and the like.

In the New Testament God has not been as prescriptive. Nonetheless, we have developed our own sets of visual aids, of which paraments are quite prominent in our congregational worship life. Consider the following as a brief review of the purpose for and meaning expressed by specific paraments used on the altar, lectern, and pulpit.<sup>5</sup>

***On the meaning of specific colors:***

White: Color of the Godhead, eternity, robe of the glorified Christ and the angels, perfection, joy, purity.

Red: Color of fire, fervor, blood, martyrdom, love, victorious truth of Christian teaching based on the blood and righteousness of Christ.

Green: Color of abiding life, nourishment, rest; dominant color in nature.

Violet: Color of royal mourning and repentance.

Black: Absence of color, symbolical of death.

***The designated use of these colors within the church year:***

White: From Christmas Eve through Epiphany (Jan. 13);

Also on Maundy Thursday when Communion is celebrated (as being the day of its institution by Christ, our Lord);

From Easter up to Whitsunday (Pentecost);

The Feast of the Holy Trinity and 1st Sunday after;

All the Festivals of Christ;

Thanksgiving Day;

For Church Dedication and Church Anniversary.

Red: Pentecost to the eve of Trinity Sunday;

The Festival of the Reformation;

Harvest Festival.

Green: From Jan. 14 through the end of Epiphany season;

From the Second Sunday after Trinity through the Trinity Season up to Advent, except on Festivals for which there are other appointments;

Violet: From Advent to Christmas Eve.

From Septuagesima Sunday through Lent (except Good Friday) up to Easter eve;

For the Day of Humiliation.

Black: For Good Friday only.

An additional note on using colors: Some have the custom of using blue as a color for royalty, in which case *blue* is used for Advent and *purple* is used only during Lent as the color for repentance.

Color is set by the church year and should not be changed merely to coordinate with the colors of a wedding or funeral, nor should they be changed because the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are being used. A bulletin announcement can call attention to a change of paraments, giving notice to the new color being used and a brief explanation for the young ones and others unaware of the reason for the practice.

Also of equal value for our worship life are the ***symbols*** which appear on the paraments. There is too much variety to detail here, but again, a note in the bulletin or a reference in a sermon will prove to be very instructive.

Does the congregation lack its own paraments? It is not difficult for a group within the

congregation to make them. Depending on location and access to resources, one can generally find a nice selection of fabrics and a large selection of symbols from which to choose. If someone in the congregation has sufficient seamstress skills, a nice set of paraments can be made quite reasonably and save hundreds of dollars that would otherwise be spent ordering a commercially made set.

The point to remember about paraments is a simple one. If you use them, use them appropriately, i.e., as an opportunity to preach the wonders of the gospel. May God preserve us from letting their use become a mere formality without meaning and an empty part of our worship life.

May pericopes and paraments both serve as helpful aids in the cause of the pastor's and congregation's privilege to preach the gospel of Jesus and His victory for us sinners.

### **Appendix: A One-Year "Through the Bible" Sermon Series**

Developed and used by a few of our CLC pastors, this sermon series is not intended to match the traditional church year and its festival seasons. Thus the Sundays will not be designated in the church year format but simply numbered 1-52. Some books of the Old and New Testaments are only covered as Scripture readings. Others are not formally treated in the series at all, but perhaps could be covered in the congregation's Bible Class. With one exception (#33) what is given for each Sunday below at least includes a sermon text and summary and a brief description or reference to potential Scripture reading content. The preacher would need to decide how much of the suggested reading content to use in the service and whether or not to apportion it into more than one reading.

1. Sermon text: Genesis 3:1-15  
Sermon summary: The Fall and the Promise  
Reading summary: Creation account of Genesis 1-2
2. Sermon text: Genesis 9:12-17  
Sermon summary: The sign of the rainbow  
Reading summary: The flood account of Genesis 6-8
3. Sermon text: Genesis 17:1-8  
Sermon summary: The promise to Abram (Abraham)  
Reading summary: Jacob and Joseph narratives
4. Sermon text: Exodus 6:1-8, 12:3-13  
Sermon summary: Promise of deliverance & the Passover  
Reading summary: The song of Moses
5. Sermon text: Exodus 34:29-35  
Sermon summary: The veil of Moses  
Reading summary: Israel at Mount Sinai
6. Sermon text: Leviticus 16:1-10, 20-22  
Sermon summary: The scapegoat  
Reading summary: God's ordinances for Israel
7. Sermon text: Numbers 6:22-37  
Sermon summary: The blessing of the Triune God  
Reading summary: Balak and Balaam
8. Sermon text: Deuteronomy 18:15-18  
Sermon summary: The promise of the Great Prophet  
Reading summary: Obeying the LORD
9. Sermon text: Joshua 24:14-28  
Sermon summary: A challenge to serve the LORD  
Reading summary: Joshua's farewell
10. Sermon text: Judges 7:1-25  
Sermon summary: Deliverance through Gideon  
Reading summary: God's governance through the judges

11. Sermon text: Ruth 4:9-13, 17b  
 Sermon summary: The Seed of the woman  
 Reading summary: Naomi and Ruth
12. Sermon text: 1 Samuel 28:1-24  
 Sermon summary: Saul and the witch of Endor  
 Reading summary: Israel asks for a king
13. Sermon text: 2 Samuel 12:15b-24  
 Sermon summary: The joyful hope of resurrection  
 Reading summary: David and Bathsheba
14. Sermon text: 1 Kings 18:20-40  
 Sermon summary: Elijah and the prophets of Baal  
 Reading summary: Elijah and Obadiah
15. Sermon text: 2 Kings 2:19-25  
 Sermon summary: Elisha mocked by the children  
 Reading summary: Elijah taken to heaven
16. Sermon text: 1 Chronicles 21:1-17  
 Sermon summary: David numbers Israel  
 Reading summary: David, the temple, and David's prayer
17. Sermon text: 2 Chronicles 36:11-21  
 Sermon summary: The fall of Jerusalem  
 Reading summary: Hezekiah and Sennacherib
18. Sermon texts: a) Ezra 9:1-15; b) Nehemiah 13:23-31  
 Sermon summaries: a) Confessional prayer;  
 b) Daily reformation  
 Reading summaries: a) Exiles return; b) God's history
19. Sermon text: Esther 4:1-17 (13-16)  
 Sermon summary: The benefit of serving the LORD  
 Reading summary: Haman's wicked plot
20. Sermon text: Job 19:23-27  
 Sermon summary: We shall live because He lives  
 Reading summary: The testing of Job
21. Sermon text: Proverbs 1:1-9  
 Sermon summary: The fear of the LORD  
 Reading summary: Excerpts of Proverbs
22. Sermon text: Ecclesiastes 12:1-14  
 Sermon summary: Only the LORD gives meaning to life  
 Reading summary: The vanity of all this world
23. Sermon text: Song of Solomon 8:5-7  
 Sermon summary: Christ's love for the Church  
 Reading summary: The Bridegroom described
24. Sermon text: Isaiah 2:1-4, 10-22  
 Sermon summary: The Kingdom of Christ  
 Reading summary: The Lord's destruction of the earth
25. Sermon text: Isaiah 54:7-10  
 Sermon summary: The mercy of the LORD  
 Reading summary: God's comfort for His people
26. Sermon text: Jeremiah 23:16-32  
 Sermon summary: The Word of God and false prophets  
 Reading summary: Excerpts from Lamentations
27. Sermon text: Ezekiel 37:1-14  
 Sermon summary: Life into dry bones  
 Reading summary: God's watchman
28. Sermon text: Daniel 9:20-27





- Sermon summary: The shedding of our mortality  
 Reading summary: Heavenly treasure in earthly jars
46. Sermon text: Philippians 3:7-14  
 Sermon summary: The prize we have in Christ  
 Reading summary: Exhortations to holy living
47. Sermon text: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17  
 Sermon summary: Preservation of the truth (Enemies within the church)  
 Reading summary: Important truths in 1-2 Thessalonians
48. Sermon text: 2 Timothy 3:1-17  
 Sermon summary: The work of preaching the Word  
 Reading summary: Church life (1 Timothy)
49. Sermon text: Hebrews 10:32-39  
 Sermon summary: Don't give it up  
 Reading summary: The cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 11)
50. Sermon text: James 2:14-26  
 Sermon summary: The living faith  
 Reading summary: Trials and temptations
51. Sermon text: 1 John 4:1-6  
 Sermon summary: The Spirit of truth and the spirits of error  
 Reading summary: Faith-life in the Son of God
52. Sermon text: Revelation 22:6-21  
 Sermon summary: "Behold, I Come"  
 Reading summary: Heaven—indescribable!

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The first two installments, "Selection of Hymns for the Worship Service" and "The Pastor's Use of Prayer," can be found in *Journal* issues 47:2 (June 2007) and 47:3 (Sept. 2007) respectively.

<sup>2</sup> As part of a general introduction on page 1 of *Sermons Texts*, we find these useful words that explain the benefits of using pericopes: "Usually pericopic selections offer a manageable portion of Scripture for treatment in a given sermon. They contain a complete unit of thought which the preacher can expound and apply in a unified way. The use of pericopic texts makes it possible for a preacher to accept an assignment and carry it out in a disciplined way. It relieves him of the task of searching for suitable texts week by week. It helps him avoid any tendency to concentrate on a pet subject. It keeps him from selecting favorite or easy or motto texts. It provides him with texts that are rich in doctrinal and practical content. Pericopic texts challenge a preacher to do solid exegetical work. They help him and the congregation grow in the knowledge of Scripture."

<sup>3</sup> "The practice of assigning certain Gospel and Epistle readings to the various Sundays, festivals and saints' days . . . has been followed from at least the time of Jerome (fl. 400). His lectionary may have provided the basis for the Roman *Ordo*, the selections used by Gregory the Great (590-604), whose writing include forty homilies on the ancient Gospel selections. This Roman series, with some modification, came into general use in the western church at the time of Charlemagne (d. 814). With slight modification, these Gospels and Epistles were used during the Middle Ages. They were taken over by Luther with minor adjustments, and he used these pericopes as texts for his *Kirchenpostille*, a model sermon book for evangelical preachers" (*Sermon Texts*, p. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Examples can be found on pages 46-70 of *Sermon Texts*, which lay out the ILCW Series. As an introduction to this three-year system, the editor writes: "Based upon the traditional pericope systems, the ILCW Series provides for a number of revisions. Actually it is a three-year system offering Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel selections in three cycles. Since the Gospel sets the tone for the Sunday, Series A is built around selections from Matthew, Series B from Mark, and Series C from Luke.... Epistle selections were chosen for their relationship to the Gospel, or they present consecutive readings on successive Sundays so that an overview of an entire Epistle is given. The Gospel of John is given prominence in the post-Easter seasons in each series" (p. 45).

<sup>5</sup> The content here given is comprised of detailed information listed in *The Lutheran Liturgy*, CPH, pages 425-426.

### **Book Reviews**

**Mark D. Thompson: *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture*, InterVarsity Press, 2006, paperback, 196 pages.**

In April of 1958 Egbert Schaller, then a pastor in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran

Synod (WELS), presented to a Minnesota District pastoral conference an essay entitled "The 'Status Controversiae' Within the Synodical Conference." His contention in this essay was that the root problem troubling the Synodical Conference at the time was essentially a difference in understanding the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. His conclusion, for which he produced abundant evidence, was that the principal question in the controversy ("Status Controversiae") was whether the Bible is clear or not in the teachings it proposes.

The correct side of the Status Controversiae was expressed in these words at the end of the essay:

Does a faithful reading of Scripture enable the Holy Ghost to speak to us in unmistakable clarity concerning the doctrine and practice which in all matters of faith and life Christ's Church is to teach and uphold, so that it is neither wholesome nor allowable for an orthodox church body to tolerate a latitude of theological opinion based upon the clear passages of Scripture . . . ?

In just a few years after Pastor Schaller presented this essay, the Synodical Conference disintegrated and the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) was formally organized. The question then was raised as to what separates the CLC from other Lutherans, particularly the WELS, which had in 1961 broken off its association with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), the largest member of the Synodical Conference. CLC President Paul Albrecht answered this question in the January 1962 issue of the *Lutheran Spokesman*, indicating that one of the reasons for separation was "deviations from the doctrine of the clarity and authority of the Scriptures." He briefly summarized the doctrine of the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture in these words: "The orthodox Lutheran Church has always believed and taught that the Scriptures are clear, that their meaning is not obscure but easily intelligible to a devout child of God. That is why the psalmist was able to say: Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. . . . And St. Peter says: 'We have a more sure Word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.'" Pastor Albrecht then went on to show how the teaching of the clarity of Scripture had been undermined by the WELS in their treatment and application of Romans 16:17-18.

From the above observations we see that the doctrine of the Bible's clarity has played a part in the history and formation of our church body. For this reason and others any book that presents and defends this doctrine should be of interest to us. Mark Thompson, an Australian teacher of theology and church history, recognizes that the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture is generally ignored or ridiculed by many in our time. "A lack of confidence that we do or even that we can know for sure what the Bible says is apparent in Western Christianity" (p. 18). For this reason he has written this shorter book on the clarity of Scripture to help Christians get back on the right track, boldly and confidently declaring to the world what God has said in His Word.

The first chapter discusses various objections which have arisen against this doctrine—from the days of the early church fathers to Karl Barth to the postmodern setting of today. Thompson rightly asks: "How is a text supposed to function authoritatively if its meaning is considered to be inaccessible?" (p. 46). In other words, how can we speak as the oracles of God if we can't figure out what the oracles are saying?

In his second chapter Thompson claims that God knows how to communicate. "If God chooses to speak to us personally, in his Son and through those he has commissioned and enabled to write his words for us, then it is no transgression of his majesty to take him at his word" (p. 79). We are happy to say that Thompson has no difficulty in declaring the canonical Scriptures to be the very Word of God.

Thompson's third chapter shows how Jesus and His apostles quoted the Old Testament as a book that clearly revealed God's will. "The extensive use of quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament in the writings of the apostles, as in the ministry of Jesus himself, is built upon an assumption that those quotations will be understood and those allusions identified" (p. 93). Psalm 119:105 is referred to in this way: "Precisely because God is light, the words he has spoken through and by means of the creaturely activity of his servants are 'a lamp to my feet and a light to my path'" (p. 97).

But if the Bible is clear, why do we have Bible classes and sermons explaining it? Thompson answers: "The clarity of Scripture does not render all exposition unnecessary. Yet for Luther, Bullinger, Whitaker and the classical exponents of this doctrine, the reverse is also true: a real place for exposition does not undermine all affirmation of the clarity of Scripture. In fact, exposition can proceed only on the assumption that the text is clear, that its meaning can be grasped and its significance for the lives of the hearers can be appreciated, since all expositions are to be tested by reference to the text itself" (p. 100). At the same time Thompson acknowledges: "No serious defense of *claritas scripturae* has ever denied that there are difficulties in Scripture. Clarity is not the same as uniform simplicity or even transparency" (p. 102). And again he says: "The clarity of Scripture must not be trivialized or used as an excuse for superficiality or exegetical laziness. God has placed both heights and depths in Scripture, given us passages so simple a child can understand them and others so intriguing they engage the ablest minds over many years" (p. 110).

Questions concerning hermeneutics, the interpretation, of Scripture are the subject of the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter attempts to restate the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture for today. Luther's debate with Erasmus on this very topic occupies over seven pages of text. The Roman Catholic Robert Bellarmine's opposition to Luther's views is noted, with this significant statement made by Thompson: "The decisions of the churches do not determine the meaning of Scripture. At their best creeds and confessions are recognition statements, acknowledging the antecedent meaning of Scripture and remaining open to correction by appeal to the actual words of the biblical text" (p. 168).

In conclusion Thompson declares: "*The clarity of Scripture is that quality of the biblical text that, as God's communicative act, ensures its meaning is accessible to all who come to it in faith.* To confess the clarity of Scripture is to adopt the same attitude as Jesus demonstrated in his own use of the Old Testament. It is to align ourselves with the confidence of the apostolic writers, who appealed to the Old Testament as intelligible and decisive even when addressing predominantly Gentile audiences. . . . In short, a confession of the clarity of Scripture is an aspect of faith in a generous God who is willing and able to make himself and his purposes known. God has something to say and he is very good at saying it" (pp. 169-170, emphasis by Thompson).

The bibliography includes numerous writings of Martin Luther as well as Robert Preus' book entitled *The Inspiration of Scripture*, which presents at length the conclusions of the seventeenth-century orthodox Lutheran theologians on this topic. As shown in the index of authors, other confessional Lutherans are referred to as well, such as Martin Chemnitz and Abraham Calov of earlier times and Robert Kolb of the present.

Surely it is good to become clear on the clarity of the Scriptures, and Thompson's book can help us toward this goal. We would go further than Thompson, I am sure, in stating that God also clearly teaches us in Scripture what orthodox Lutherans have confessed concerning monergistic conversion, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Antichrist, church fellowship, and the separation principle of Romans 16:17-18.

**Francis Pieper: *The Church and Her Treasure: Lectures on Justification and the True Visible Church*, The Luther Academy, 1916, 2007, paperback, 297 pages, translated by O. Marc Tangner.**

Although he was originally a member of the Wisconsin Synod, Francis (or Franz) Pieper (1852-1931), already at the age of 26, accepted a call to the Missouri Synod seminary in St. Louis and was groomed to take the place of C. F. W. Walther as teacher of systematic theology. After Walther's death Pieper became the president of the seminary (1887-1931) and later became also president of the Missouri Synod for over a decade (1899-1911). Pieper followed very closely in the footsteps of his predecessor. This volume of Pieper's lectures shows that he continued the Friday night lectures of Walther, which resulted in Walther's outstanding treatment of the distinction between law and gospel.

Pieper's book is divided into two parts: nineteen lectures on justification and twenty-three lectures on the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the true visible church on earth. All these lectures were first delivered in German in 1891 and first published in printed form in 1916. The translator, O. Marc Tangner, states in his preface: "According to available information, these lectures have never before been translated, at least not in their entirety" (p. xxiv).

In both sets of lectures Pieper uses writings of Walther as the starting point for his own teaching. For example, in the first lecture Pieper frames the topic for his students by referring to a synodical paper Walther had presented on justification in 1859. While quoting Walther quite regularly throughout the lectures, Pieper in turn quotes Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and Luther himself.

As we might expect, the Roman Catholic teaching on justification is severely condemned. I doubt whether there is anyone in the Missouri Synod today willing to say in public what Pieper says about the papacy. As an example we read on page 85: "In keeping with God's will, every Christian should take the same stand toward the pope as Luther did. No one can love Christ without hating the pope. For the pope is the worst enemy of Christ. No one can love God's church without hating the papacy, for the papacy is the greatest enemy and destroyer of the church. Of necessity hatred of the papacy arises from the love of Christ and the gospel." The doctrine that the papacy is the foretold Antichrist was not some ancient teaching lying in obscurity in an outdated confession, but rather was something proclaimed openly from pulpit and lectern. How horrified Pieper would be to know that a president of the Missouri Synod in later years would make a trip to Vatican City to visit the pope and that the majority of professing Lutherans in the world today would be in agreement with a document rescinding orthodox condemnations of the Roman Catholic teachings on justification. Nevertheless, there is nothing in what Pieper says about the papacy that is not still relevant today.

The basis for Pieper's lectures on the true visible church is the set of theses Walther drew up as a treatise, one of his early productions entitled "The Evangelical Lutheran Church, the True Visible Church of God on Earth." There are twenty-five theses in all, and they are conveniently printed as an addendum in Pieper's volume. Walther's comments on his own theses were presented at a synodical convention in 1866 and printed in German in book form in 1867. An English translation appeared in 1961.

Walther's intention, and also Pieper's, was to prove that a Lutheran church body which follows the Lutheran Confessions as contained in *the Book of Concord* of 1580 is orthodox and not in need of doctrinal revision. The last thesis in the set, Thesis XXV, states: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church has, then, all the essential marks of the true visible Church of God on earth as they are found in no other known communion; and therefore it needs no reformation of doctrine" (p. 284).

Much of what Walther said in his treatise and what Pieper says in this book has to do with the proper interpretation of Scripture and is very valuable for that reason alone. There are lectures on the clarity of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, and the proper distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines.

Pieper emphasizes the important truth that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is definitely not the only visible church that has believers in Christ in its fellowship. Nevertheless, Pieper again and again shows how important it is that every Christian makes the determination by his own study of Scripture and his careful observation that the outward fellowship he is part of is not guilty of promoting or tolerating false teaching. Pieper wants no part of any kind of unionism. It is certainly refreshing to hear his presentation of Romans 16:17-18 and similar passages.

We conclude this review by quoting some of Pieper's warnings against unionism, so important for us and all other Lutherans who want to be confessional to keep in mind. Already in one of his lectures on justification, Pieper states:

The reason so many Christians remain in heterodox churches is because the truth is not clearly and plainly presented to them from God's Word; and therefore they are not aware of it. As soon as a Christian becomes aware that something is not in keeping with God's Word, he will back away from the error. He will leave the errant congregation and will

join an orthodox church (p. 32).

Nowhere does Scripture enjoin Christians to settle for a pastor who is partially right and partially wrong in his doctrine (p. 263).

Whoever promotes false doctrine in the church *eo ipso* sets himself against Christ—because Christ does not wish anything to be preached in the church other than His Word (p. 266).

This is the way the world establishes unity, even in matters of religion: each party must compromise a bit. . . . *But God's Word is not an article of trade but an article of faith.* God's Word is not to be haggled and bartered for, but it is to be taught (p. 269).

A further mark of the orthodox church is that it not only acknowledges the authority of orthodox doctrine but also actually preaches it. . . . The character of a church is determined by what it actually teaches and not by what it perhaps ought to teach according to its official documents (pp. 272, 273).

One does right in judging our church by what its pastors preach in San Francisco, New Orleans, New York, or Chicago. . . . As a synod we give guarantee, so to speak for *each* pastor. . . . If a pastor begins to teach false doctrine, then as a church body we take disciplinary action. Either we are able to correct him, in which case he remains with us; or if we are unable to do so, we exclude him. Our church is assessed also, for example, by what our theology professors publicly teach and especially by what they write. . . . In the Christian assemblage God does not wish one person to teach one thing and another to teach something else. God wishes us all to agree in all teachings. . . . If three-quarters of the pastors of a church body teach rightly but one quarter promotes false doctrine, and this is tolerated, then the quarter which teaches false doctrine deprives the entire church body of its orthodoxy (pp. 274-275).

In this world one cannot separate from error without at the same time separating from those who propagate it, the false teachers. . . . When the apostle Paul warns Christians against condoning false doctrine, he stresses that they must separate from the persons who spread the false doctrine (p. 275).

We do nevertheless insist on doctrinal unity in all the same articles commanded by God. If we wish to acknowledge a church body as orthodox, it must be in agreement with us on all articles of doctrine (p. 277).

*Concerning Church Fellowship*, one of the founding confessions of our church body, seems to be in agreement with what Pieper teaches with respect to unionism. In some places it seemingly has taken its argument and even its wording from what Pieper had said so many years ago.

Based on its comprehensive agreement with Scripture and our own confession, I highly recommend to our readers the acquisition of this volume.

- David Lau