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WHO SHOULD REPENT?

Luke 13:1-5 and Acts 2:38-39

Frank Gantt

* The following meditations were the second and third sermons to be preached in the series “Repentance Questions Answered” during the Lenten season of 2013.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Repentance is not a popular subject to most people. The very suggestion that the word *repentance* brings is that wrong has been committed. But no one wants to hear or admit that he has done wrong. The motto of sinful man is this: Point the finger of blame in another direction, any direction, but don't point it at me. There is no greater cause for conflict in human-to-human relationships than the refusal to repent after having done wrong. This refusal to repent also keeps sinners from having a saving relationship of peace with God.

Well, even though repentance is not a popular topic to talk about, it remains an important subject nevertheless, and so it is the focus of our meditations during Lent this year. On Ash Wednesday we asked the question: What is repentance? We were reminded that genuine repentance isn't just a sorrow for sin, or *contrition*, but also the trusting, or *faith*, in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Today we ask an equally important question: Who should repent? For an answer we turn to our first text in Luke 13:1-5:

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (ESV)

From the historian Josephus we can gain only a little back-ground into the political strivings of Jesus' day. For instance, in connection with Jesus' trial we know from the Bible that Pilate and Herod had been adversaries until Pilate sent Jesus to Herod to be questioned by him (Luke 23:12). Why were they adversaries? As worldly rulers are commonly more concerned with their own authority and power, so also Pilate and Herod were at odds with one another as they attempted to solidify their own authority and recognition—Pilate in Judea and Herod in Galilee. The event described in the opening verse of our text might well have been one of those times when Pilate was attempting to show his authority over Herod.

Because of Jesus' growing popularity among the people, it also seems likely that some wanted to draw Jesus into this struggle for political power. We know of one time when the people wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him an earthly king (John 6:15). Or maybe it was just another trick to try to get Jesus to take a stand either for or against Herod or for or against Pilate. We can't really say why the people were telling Jesus about this event. In fact, all we can do is listen to Jesus' response and learn from it.

What was Jesus' response? He turned the issue around from a discussion of current events to a deeply spiritual issue about the subject of repentance. More specifically, Jesus has turned it into an opportunity to teach us all the important matter of who should repent. “*Who must repent?*” is our question tonight. “*Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish*” is the decisive and timeless answer.

Jesus understood the tendency of sinful human nature to think of others as being much worse than one's self. We all have a tendency to think that way. For example, if someone pulls out in front of us on the highway, we think he's a jerk; but if we do the same to another driver, it's because we are in a hurry. So it is also that when something terrible happens to a group of people, it is not uncommon for some to point the finger of blame, claiming that they must have made God angry. I recall a famous televangelist making the claim that Hurricane Andrew in the 1990s was God's judgment on the people of Florida and other parts of the Southeast for their acceptance of homosexuality, as though they alone held the guilt for such immorality.

Jesus has said quite pointedly that this is not the case. To stress the lesson, He refers to another incident at that time, an accident in which eighteen individuals had lost their lives. Jesus was not ignorant of the current events of His day, but rather saw the deeper implications, the spiritual implications involved in them. So in reference to the tragic collapse of the Tower of Siloam, He has posed the question: “*Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?*” Then He gives the answer: “*No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*” That reply from Christ again serves as the proper answer to our question this evening: Who should repent? Unless *you* repent, *you* will all likewise perish.

Who should repent? You should repent; I should repent. Every tragedy we witness on the evening news, every cataclysmic event taking place in the world, every natural or man-made disaster is a reminder to us all that the day is coming when each one of us will die, after which will be the judgment. When that day will be we don’t know. What its cause will be we don’t know. We only know that because of sin death is a certainty and after it we must face the judgment. There’s no escaping this solemn fact. Young or old, rich or poor, well-liked or hardly known—it doesn’t matter. Judgment Day is coming, and the only way to escape eternal condemnation is through repentance, that is, contrition for sin and faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

Although it makes for somewhat awkward English, we could express Jesus’ thoughts in this way: “Unless you keep on repenting, you will all perish in a similar manner.” Jesus is not saying that the person who fails to respond to these signs will die a similar kind of physical death. Rather, He says that the person who rejects His urgent call to repent will suffer a similar tragic fate—similar, but not identical. The eternal death sentence known as hell is similar because it is tragic, and yet it is far, far worse. That is why Jesus’ call to repent is so urgent. And that is why he wants you, me, and everyone else to repent while the time to do so, our time of grace, is still happening.

This great urgency leads to the second Scripture text for us to consider this evening, the one from Acts 2:38-39:

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (ESV)

Who should repent? You should repent, but not just because you will perish otherwise. It is also because you are included in the great promise of forgiveness of sins and everlasting life through Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross in our place.

Think about the people to whom Peter spoke these words. Who were they? They were some of the same who had been present in the mob gathered around Pontius Pilate during the early morning hours of Good Friday. They were some of the same who cried out, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Peter told them quite pointedly in just a few verses prior that they had “*crucified by the hands of lawless men*” their Lord (Acts 2:23).

After hearing this blunt word of condemnation, the people, we are told, were pricked in their hearts. They were condemned because of their guilt and convicted in their own conscience. That is, through the piercing accusation of God’s Law at work in their hearts, they had become sorry for their sin and asked what they should do. From Peter came the answer: “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.*”

We are, of course, no less responsible for Jesus’ death than any of those individuals. Though we were not there on that day of injustice carried out by them and by Pilate, our sin cries out just as surely for Jesus’ crucifixion. Whenever we speak harshly to another person, whether we feel justified or not, we are also joining in with the mob in shouting, “Crucify Him!” Whenever we open our hearts and minds to immoral and ungodly ideas, lusts, and vanities, we are just as vehemently calling for the death of our Lord. Whenever we use our hands or feet or eyes to violate any of God’s Ten Commandments, we are just as certainly saying, “Away with this man.”

The good news of the text from Acts 2 also comes in verse 39: “*For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.*” The call to repent is certainly urgent, for otherwise we perish too. But it is also a call of timeless grace, because the promise of forgiveness of sins is also for us and our children and to as many others as the Lord calls to Himself through the Gospel. We should repent not just because we are guilty, but also because God is gracious and forgiving for Jesus’ sake.

Sorrow over sin doesn’t take away that sin or its guilt. It only prepares us to rely on Jesus alone for the forgiveness of sins and removal of our guilt before God. That’s what the suffering of Jesus was destined to achieve. It would accomplish the full atonement of all our sins and it would purchase our complete forgiveness with God. It is not a mere symbol of goodness suffering at the hands of evil. In fact, the injustice of men against Christ would lead to the justice of God carried out through Christ. And so divine goodness would overcome human evil and provide us a genuine reconciliation with our holy God.

So then, who must repent? We all must repent. You must repent and I must repent. And as we repent together and are forgiven together, so we rejoice together and together receive the gift of the Holy Spirit unto eternal life by the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior. That gift includes forgiveness of sins as well as the faith to believe it, all granted to us by the God who saves sinners solely because of His grace. Amen!

WHY SHOULD I REPENT? Luke 23:27-31 and Acts 3:19

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

In our midweek Lenten meditations we are considering what our Lord Jesus says about repentance. Two weeks ago we focused on the initial topic: What is Repentance? Repentance, you’ll recall, is two essential things joined together; these are contrition and faith. That is, we are sorry for the sins we have committed against God, and we believe the gospel that tells us that our sins are forgiven because of Christ. Last week we considered the topic covered in the question Who. Who must repent? The answer is clear: it’s everyone. Regardless of your religious affiliation or history, what you have done or not done, you must repent.

Today we consider the third question in the series “Repentance Questions Answered.” Why is repentance such an important part of the Christian life? Why must we repent? For the answer we turn our attention first to the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 23:27-31:

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (ESV)

We know it as cause and effect, namely, that the things you and I do have consequences. If you eat your fruits and vegetables, drink plenty of water, and get some exercise every day, you can expect to be fairly healthy. On the other hand, if you fill up on junk food, consume large amounts of alcohol, and smoke, you can expect that your health will be diminished. Everyone understands the basics of cause and effect.

So it was that while Jesus was walking the *Via Delarosa*, the Way of Sorrows, some women were following along, mourning and wailing for Jesus, as He was led out of the city to be crucified. Crucifixion, let’s realize, was a punishment reserved for specific kinds of criminals: murderers, insurrectionists, and thieves of the worst kind. Perhaps these women had no idea of the charges that were leveled against Jesus. But one thing they knew: He was going to a terrible, terrible place—Golgotha, the Place of the Skull—and there He was going to suffer and die as a criminal. With that reality in view they mourned and lamented for Jesus.

Jesus heard their cries, but He told them that they were crying for the wrong reason and for the wrong person. What was happening to Him was part of God's plan for the redemption of mankind and the salvation of His people. This was God's plan from eternity, even as the Word of God refers to Jesus as "the Lamb" that was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8 NKJ). And it's not as though the Son of God was an unwilling participant in all of this. He Himself had said quite clearly: "No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. . ." (John 10:18 ESV). Surely the tears shed for Jesus were misspent.

Jesus told the women as much when He said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." These words contained both a spiritual plea and a prophecy of something to come. And so He continued: "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'"

Then Jesus spoke the cryptic words that conclude our text: "For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" What does that question mean? It seems to be a proverbial expression. A green tree is not so easily set on fire, whereas a dry one is quite easily kindled and burns rapidly. With this comparison in mind the meaning of the passage seems to be this: If they, the Romans, do these things to Christ, who is innocent and blameless; if they so cruelly act against justice in handing Him, the innocent one, to be crucified, what horrors will they commit upon this guilty nation? What security do the people have that heavier judgments will not come upon them? What desolations and woes may be expected when injustice and oppression have taken the place of justice and have set up a rule over this wicked people? Our Lord was referring to the calamities that would come upon them by the Romans in the destruction of their city and temple in the year AD 70. But the destruction of Jerusalem and its inhabitants was not a judgment of the Romans alone; it was the judgment of God, foretold by Jesus, not only in our text but in other places in the Gospels as well. God made use of the wickedness of the Romans to bring His righteous judgment upon the people that rejected Him and His Christ.

Herein we begin to find an answer to our question: Why should I repent? The answer is that our sin, our disobedience to God's commands and our rebellion against His rule, has brought on the righteous anger of our holy God. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were guilty of a great sin—not just killing the prophets that God sent, but also of killing His only-begotten Son. Our sins, however, are no less serious. In fact, many of our sins are in the same vein as theirs. We haven't killed God's prophets, but any despising of God's Word or its preaching sparks His wrath just the same. We weren't the ones who cried out, "Away with Jesus," and yet our sins have been the cause of His crucifixion just the same. Part of the reason why we should repent, then, is the undeniable fact that we are just as deserving of God's temporal and eternal punishment as were the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

That's ultimately what Jesus said in His warning to the women. Yes, the day was coming when an unequalled brutality would descend upon Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans; but the suffering and anguish of those days were temporary. Hell, on the other hand, is eternal. It is not just to die; it is to die under God's judgment and be cut off from God's mercy. The whole world and those in it are perishing, and we cannot rescue ourselves from the same destruction: eternal death and suffering in hell. We can only be brought to God in sorrow over our sin, pleading for mercy in the hope that He will pardon us and spare us.

Well, it's more than a longing that we have. We actually have God's word and promise on it, what we hear from our second text this evening, written in Acts 3:19 (ESV): "**Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.**"

In our last meditation we considered the words of Peter to the crowd of people that heard him on Pentecost. There Peter told them that through repentance they and their children (and we and our children) would receive the forgiveness of sins. In this verse from Acts 3 Peter was speaking to another group of people. This group had gathered at the temple after God had used Peter and John to heal a man who had been lame since his birth. When the people flocked to Peter and John, Peter took the opportunity

to remind them of their great sin in calling for the release of a murderer, Barabbas, and insisting that their Lord be crucified. Then he said, “*Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.*”

It’s important what Peter said and what he did not say. He did not say that it’s all ok, because Jesus died to take away all their sins. It is most certainly true that Jesus is the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world. Many people, however, have taken that good news to be a license to sin, since Jesus has taken away all the sins of all the world. It’s a tempting attitude to have, one which we also find ourselves struggling against so often. Peter, however, called the people to be genuinely sorry for their sins and to turn away from them. But included in Peter’s words was a personal promise for each individual sinner that the fruits of Jesus’ suffering and death for our sin have become the assurance that my sins are “blotted out” by the blood of Christ.

The Bible does not teach us that repentance itself takes away sin. Rather, it teaches that in repentance God brings us personal access to His forgiving grace extended toward us in Christ. And so it is that through repentance we are re-united with God in a relationship of peace, knowing that His wrath is no longer kindled against us for the sake of His dear Son and His atonement in our place.

This is what many unbelievers don’t get. They look at Christians and conclude that we are hypocrites because sin doesn’t disappear from our lives. We know and readily admit that we are sinners and also that we continue to sin. In fact, we step into the light of God’s Word so that we can have our sins exposed all the more. We publicly—before God and one another and anyone else who cares to walk through the church doors—confess our sins. When God tells us in His Word that we have sinned, we say: Amen; yes, indeed, it’s true.

Why? We do so because the Holy Spirit has revealed to us the truth that though we deserve God’s temporal and eternal punishment, God has laid on His Son the iniquity of us all. We should repent and do repent because through sorrow as worked by the law, we are lead to look to Jesus for comfort and healing. We should repent and do repent because through faith in the gospel we *receive* God’s absolution. We repent because when God absolves us—when He forgives us, when He justifies us—He rescues us from the threatening perils of our sins. Even as we hear from Paul in the book of Romans: “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (8:1 ESV).

Through repentance forgiveness of sins is brought to us by the One who faced eternal damnation on the cross in our place. Along with that precious gift He also gives to us the gifts of being at peace with God and having life and salvation under His grace. With so much against us because of our sin and yet so great a treasure offered to us in Christ, the Holy Spirit is bringing us to repentance day by day so that we know the joy of living as redeemed children of God and heirs of everlasting life. In that Word and promise of grace may we always know the blessed answer to the question why you and I should repent. Amen!

“The Depth of the Riches”

Michael Roehl

* The title of the essay below contains the initial words expressed in Romans 11:33. Its original content presented to the West Central Delegate Conference in May of 2013 has been revised for inclusion in this issue of the *Journal*. All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Introduction

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Occasionally we lack something we wish we had. More often in our world, however, the only things we truly lack are awareness and thanksgiving for what we already possess. In other words, what we lack is not the thing itself, but appreciation for the fact that we have it, and also thankfulness to the One who gave it to us.

We live in an extraordinarily privileged society, yet routinely we fail to appreciate that fact, and as a result we also fail to demonstrate any sort of thankfulness for it. Simply pausing for a moment to reflect on what we even now possess suddenly brings into focus the fact that we have been given a whole world of unrealized and unappreciated gifts—things like an unprecedented standard of living, mind-boggling medical care, ever-increasing longevity of life, freedom to speak our minds and to worship according to the dictates of our consciences, peace, security, and the like.

While unappreciated blessings are abundant in our secular world, the same holds true to an even greater extent in the spiritual, where our blessings are virtually unlimited but even more underappreciated. The only way to correct the problem is to address it not in the macro, but in the micro. While it is rather pointless to try to grasp and be thankful for *all* that we have, the best way to make progress toward that goal is to focus on individual gifts. It is only in laying the individual tiles that we can eventually come to recognize, comprehend, and appreciate the larger mosaic.

So it is that we seek to identify just one of the individual tiles in this study: one small piece of the larger mural of all that we have been given. That one gift we examine in this essay is depth—*spiritual* depth, both in our individual Christian faith and in the larger context of our congregational life and worship.

The purpose here is not to tear down other church bodies that may or may not have such a gift, but to learn to understand and to appreciate what we do have now as our possession in the CLC. Our goal is to learn to appreciate what we have with this end in mind: that we not only learn to be thankful, but we also learn to cherish, utilize, share, and protect such a gift.

The need for depth – ripples, waves, swells

On a memorable family outing on Lake Sakakawea we encountered something I had seen often on two oceans and the Gulf of Mexico, but never on an inland lake; we encountered swells. Not waves, but swells. I began to wonder if I was just imagining that there is actually a difference. Assuming that the sources I checked are correct in what they state, there is a difference. Ripples, waves, and swells are all types of waves, but the difference (again, according to those who claim to know) has to do with the amount of energy involved, and how deeply that energy is transmitted into a body of water. Drop a pebble into a still pond, or blow on the surface of your cup of coffee, and you will see ripples. Very little energy is transmitted into the water. On the opposite extreme are seismic shifts, underwater landslides, and prolonged, strong, consistent winds, which in a large, deep body of water will all transmit a great deal of energy, eventually producing swells of varying intensity. When those swells encounter an immovable object, like a land mass, the shallower water near its shore cannot contain all the energy of the swell. That energy is diminished by the riptide of waves that have bounced off of the land mass, and the swell becomes a wave. Another way to look at it is that a swell will continue long after the force that created it is gone. A wave, on the other hand, dies rather quickly when the wind that created it has diminished.

It comes as no surprise, then, that ripples dissipate very quickly, since the energy is absorbed by forces like surface tension. Waves typically last only as long as the wind that sustains them is blowing. They are completely at the mercy of the wind that gives them direction, as well as life and motion. Remove the wind, and they quickly die. Shift the wind, and the wave shifts with it, which also explains why you never see a wave actually running counter to the wind. If the wind changes course, so do the waves.

Not so with swells. Swells are encountered on large bodies of water, even on calm days, even thousands of miles from where they were formed. Swells can, and often do, run contrary to the wind in a given area, which means that waves and swells can actually run in different directions at the same time.

This also helps to explain how in ancient times, experienced mariners could navigate without the aid of compass, sextant, charts, or celestial bodies, all by knowing the pattern of swells.

If we carry all of this into the area of faith and religion, the comparison begins to give us insight and a way to chart the importance of spiritual depth, and why spiritual depth is so defeating to the plans of our great adversary.

The winds of man-made religious thought shift incessantly. Therefore all who ride the wave of current religious thought are absolutely at the mercy of the prevailing wind of the day—regardless of where that wave carries them or the rocks against which it crashes.

Even the most casual observer can see this phenomenon play out ceaselessly with the passage of time. How else can one explain the radical swing in doctrine among the various Christian denominations? How is it possible that an entire denomination could be shifted, in a matter of a few short decades, from a high view to a low view of the authority of Scripture? How else could it come about that entire segments of the Christian population shift from seeing an action as sinful to regarding it as a harmless lifestyle? How is it possible that the murder of a pre-born baby could quickly become just another choice a mother should be free to make?

The answer, as often as not, comes down to a question of depth, or to be more precise, the lack thereof. Every superficial variety of Christianity, regardless of the shape or form it takes, leaves its adherents perilously susceptible to every wind of error. All such souls are also in constant spiritual danger because they typically rely not on their God and His Word, but on their church, or an individual in that church, or a program that the church offers. Tire of the group, the man, or the program, and they are ready for or at least susceptible to the next wave.

On the other hand, just as the swell powers on its course through the ever-changing winds and waves, the Christian whose faith is carried along by the depth and power of God and His Word can and will survive, even in the face of great adversity. He will be little affected by that which happens only on the surface.

Depth is not necessarily deep

Clearly then, if the sort of Christianity that lacks depth is in constant danger of catastrophic failure, we need to know what is meant by “depth.” We obviously want it, but what is it? And how do we get it?

The most common misconception is that depth, almost by definition, must always involve an element of “deep”—deep thoughts, complex arguments, erudite philosophies, and the like. Not so, said Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:2-5:

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Spiritual depth does not come from a complex message that challenges our mental powers to grasp it; it comes from a most simple message that is persistently treasured. Such depth involves the stubborn refusal either to simplify the Christian faith beyond what God allows or to make it not one bit more complex than God intended. Some would summarize the basic message as “law and gospel,” others as the nearly synonymous “sin and grace.” Both are good and succinct summaries of the Christian faith, but true depth also includes not only a rigid, inflexible adherence to these simple truths, but also a world-view that is shaped in its entirety around that framework.

Sometimes it is easier to define a thing according to its opposite. As an example of a *lack of* depth consider the seed sown on something other than good, deep soil in the Lord’s parable of the Sower and the Seed:

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up

and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:3-8)

In subsequent verses the Lord gives His explanation to the parable:

“The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:14-20)

Jesus has made it clear here that those who fell away did not do so because of a lack of the basics of Christianity. They clearly knew and believed those simple truths at one point, or they wouldn't have been Christians. The problem was not that they never knew; it was that they knew the truth but lost it.

The single most common cause for the destruction of saving faith is the attempt man makes to improve God's salvation plan by modifying it, typically by leaving out either the law (sin) or the gospel (grace), or by failing to distinguish clearly between the two.

Man thereby goes shallow rather than truly deep. Man naturally seeks that which *seems* or *feels* new and appealing and mistakes infatuation or mental stimulation for godly depth. As with so many other aspects of life, what seems easy and instant are invariably the most tempting options.

True depth almost always requires effort and training

Especially during their dating years young men and women often are looking for very different characteristics or attributes in a mate than what their parents are seeking. Parents tend to like quiet, sensible partners for their children. What is seen as boring by the young man or woman is met with a parental *“Still waters run deep.”* Part of the problem is that most young people are more interested in the dating equivalent of white-water rafting than they are in quiet canoeing.

Unfortunately, the same often holds true for those seeking out or deciding upon a church home. New Christians in particular tend to be drawn to what we could call “white-water” churches, and they don't tend to understand or appreciate the depth of those waters that seem to be running so slowly. To compound the problem further, although age and experience can teach young people that their parents were right about suitable mates, the choice of the shallow but exciting church home can actually *prevent* the growth and maturity necessary to identify the shallowness for what it truly is. In other words, while children tend to mature eventually with or without their parents' input, most church members make themselves dependent upon their congregations for their spiritual growth and Christian maturity. Whenever and wherever the church fails to teach such things, their members seldom find it elsewhere. It's a merging, if you will, of *“You don't know what you don't know”* with the *“blind guides”* mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 15:14.

Compare also the following section from [Hebrews 5:11-14](#):

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

The frustration of the inspired writer is palpable, and painfully so. Although it is obvious that his target audience lacked the depth they ought to have had at that point in their Christian development, curiously enough, God the Holy Spirit did not seek to assign blame for the problem. The problem was

that the people were spiritually shallow and immature. *How* they got to be that way, or more accurately, how it came about that they had experienced little or no growth or maturing of faith, was clearly not as important as how they would correct the problem. As with anyone who is lost, the path that got them there was not nearly as important as the path forward. Notice that the path forward is clearly identified as “*the basic principles of the oracles of God*”—God’s Word. And not only that, but God’s Word in its purest, most basic form, which gets us right back to law and gospel, sin and grace. The basic message, therefore, is not shallower and broader, but deeper and more specific. Foundations aren’t effective because they are broad and shallow, but because they are (inasmuch as they are) deep and strong.

This is where the whole element of training comes in. It also explains how and why promoting true depth will always be an uphill struggle, and why it will never enjoy the favor of the masses. Deep and strong invariably require cost and effort. Not so with shallow. Shallow tends to be quick, light, and easy—religion’s equivalent of microwave dinners. Little effort, minimal time, and no need for any sort of dedication or commitment.

You can see a microcosm of the bigger problem in the modern shift from church organ to guitar in services conducted according to the “contemporary worship” setting. Anyone who has casually picked up and strummed a guitar knows how relatively easy that instrument is to play, at least on a certain level. In fact, if you memorize about twenty different chords, and develop some strength in your left hand and some calluses on your finger tips, you will find that you can pretty much play along with just about every song you hear on the radio.

I recall, in contrast, a time when I was looking through the organ book of a friend who had taken organ for about as long as I had played guitar. It began to dawn on me just then that their music might be a bit more complicated than mine, that there might be more to it than I had supposed. Well, the truth of the matter was that I wasn’t even in the same league. The reason why those dedicated souls had trudged back and forth to their lessons and practiced so long and so hard for all those years was that there was immensely more to their craft than the standard three-chord guitar songs that I knew.

Certainly the difference was not so much the instrument as the level of music played on the instrument. That said, those who grow up with church organs, played each Sunday by those who make it look so easy, tend to take that tremendous gift for granted. While there is nothing inherently wrong with using other instruments to worship our God, nothing compares with the gift that God gave to His church in the form of the church organ. Nothing so fills God’s houses of worship than the full-throated organ, together with the incredibly complex music that can there be presented as part of our praise and worship.

On a deeper and thus less obvious level the complexity of music played skillfully on an organ reminds us of the complexity and majesty that is God. It isn’t what we hear in our day-to-day secular walk; but why should it be? Why would we want to offer our God anything less than the very best that we have when we join in our corporate worship? Certainly other instruments can be *added*, and some are even more appropriate in certain settings (Think “Away in a Manger” sung by children on Christmas Eve, accompanied by a gentle guitar). But that is addition by addition, and only by careful, appropriate selection. It is not forcing an artificial addition by subtraction. Why, then, have so many churches decided to substitute that which is less in many ways for what has served God’s people so well for so long? The obvious answer is more than just a matter of taste. It goes to depth, as well as to effort and understanding.

Church organists tend to practice and play for worship services and little else. It is the single focus of all those years of study and effort. Nor can the church organ be packed up and used for weekend engagements. There are fewer and fewer church organists—not because the organ no longer serves as the ultimate musical instrument for corporate worship, but because learning to play that magnificent instrument, and to play it well, requires a tremendous dedication for a very singular, selfless purpose: the corporate worship of God. People in our society seem to have less and less time for such things, even when they possess all the necessary gifts and abilities. The direction is all befuddled. The trend today is to learn to play an instrument according to the dictates of the individual’s own tastes and benefits, and then to have the pastor persuade that person to include church services in their list of performance venues.

We find an almost identical set of circumstances in the area of doctrine. Worship and praise have their place in every Christian church service. They are, after all, called *worship* services. However, if that

was the full extent of what God expected from and desired for His children, then His Word would not include all the passages that it does relating to growth, depth, and maturity. In addition to Hebrews 5:11-14 cited above, consider the following in Ephesians 4:11-16:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Paul returns us here to the wind, wave, swell, and ripple analogy we explored earlier. Without depth based on substance, human beings will inevitably find themselves at the mercy of group mentality, and trends, and the clever, persuasive arguments of those who have cast off the moorings of God's Word. Note in particular how Paul does not seek here to carry us to a bold, new world of thought, but to a full and complete knowledge of the "fullness of Christ." In fact, that depth and fullness are exactly what he cites as the only thing that can prevent us from being "carried about by every wind of doctrine."

In his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul carefully explains how such depth is achieved and how it is not. It is not through human wisdom, clever speech, or plausible arguments, but through an ongoing immersion in the most basic truths of the Word and wisdom of our God, as we hear in 1 Corinthians 2:1-13:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

Do not pass over such things lightly. Here we are shown true depth and substance—divine gifts that always and only originate from our God and are granted only by Him.

Why then would anyone ever want to substitute something less? The answer, again, goes to effort and understanding. Emotion is fun and worship is relatively easy. True depth takes work.

One area where this becomes immediately apparent is in the area of instruction, both of children and adults. Conservative confessional Lutheranism has always advocated a thorough instruction of the church's youth, both in Sunday School and in Confirmation classes. In some circles this practice is under attack; in others the battle is no longer being fought. As public education continues to trend away from the work-intensive "three Rs" and more toward social fairness and awareness, there is pressure for churches to follow suit. "Is all that memory work really necessary?" "How well do they have to memorize, or if they just get the general drift, is that good enough?" "Is there any way you could get this done in one year instead of two?" The pressure to teach less and demand less is relentless. Many Christian denominations have long since given up. In some denominations the so-called Confirmation

class is taught not by the pastor but by lay volunteers, and often by those who are themselves untrained. When children are taught generalities (or doctrine) as opinions, the inevitable result will be adult members who formulate and follow their own opinions. Yet the solution that is most often advocated is to continue to make instruction more fun, less thorough, and less rigorous. I know of one local church that allows its young people to opt out of Confirmation classes by attending one three-day weekend retreat. The idea seems to be that if Confirmation deals more with feelings and emotions, the church's youth will actually *want* to attend and will continue to participate in church life after Confirmation. What we are seeing, however, is just the opposite.

The obvious solution is to do the hard work that will always be necessary for true Christian education, and then to trust the Holy Spirit to work the fruits of faith through that instruction in God's Word. One passage that has comforted parents whose children drift from the church after Confirmation is Proverbs 22:6: "***Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.***" By definition, however, that great promise is nullified or cancelled if the child is never brought up in that "*way he should go*" in the first place.

The same pressures exist in connection with adult membership. All congregations want new members, and that desire often allows a natural tendency to dominate: gathering visitors into the fold as quickly and as painlessly as possible. The modern trend, therefore, is to avoid noting and dealing with differences. Anecdotal evidence indicates that in most mainline denominations today differences are never even discussed, let alone resolved. But even in connection with adults no one is well served by the desire for or trend toward quick and easy—not the individuals who need to learn and not the congregations themselves. The sort of unity commanded by God is the first casualty. Unity for them becomes "agreeing to disagree agreeably." Compare this trend to what the Holy Spirit has advocated through the Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:14-18:

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.

Think of the imposing task that lay before the Apostles as they set about forming the New Testament Church according to what Jesus told them to do. They were confronted with an entire world that knew nothing of Jesus Christ, let alone the New Testament, which had yet to be written. Yet the Lord's Great Commission was abundantly clear in Matthew 28:19-20: "***Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.***"

The task Jesus set before His chosen representatives was unimaginably daunting, but the solution was neither to shirk their responsibility and calling nor to try to find an easier, faster way. Jesus was certainly smart enough to know if there was a faster, easier, better way. His answer comes in His parting words to His New Testament Church and its founding leaders: "*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*"

The point here is that the Church should not even be *contemplating* shortcuts, or what is called "Church-Lite," let alone attempting or adopting such things. God doesn't allow us such latitude.

Puritanism and Pietism – the natural results of a lack of depth

I still cringe at the recollection of a young lady who, imagining that the pool she was jumping into was deeper than it was, jumped in feet first and shattered both of her heels. As bad as that sounds, far worse things have happened when Christians entrusted their souls to a church that has only the

appearance of depth. Two of the most common aberrations are Puritanism and Pietism. Though there are subtle differences between the two, both can be summed up as “*deeds, not creeds.*”

Puritanism emerged from the Church of England in the 16th century, primarily as a reaction to the godless conduct of the members of the priesthood. Many of the first American colonists were Puritans, including those who came over on the *Mayflower* and landed at Plymouth Rock. Pietism, on the other hand, emerged within the Lutheran Church of the 17th and 18th centuries. It too was a reaction to the godless conduct of those who claimed to be Christians. One key difference between the two movements was that Puritans believed that the state must serve as an enforcer of the moral Christian code of conduct. Strains of this movement are still in evidence in many areas of modern American thought and politics.

While being sympathetic to the basic concern of these two movements (true Christianity should produce appropriate fruits of faith, after all), confessional Christians also recognize the inherent danger in each one. Morality cannot be legislated. Nor can the state be trusted to enforce always and only what God decrees as morality (e.g., the Salem witch trials). Beyond that any focus on actions, rather than on law and gospel, will invariably lead right back to the core problems of Roman Catholicism—a dependence on human actions as that which saves or damns. In other words, Puritans and Pietists were taught to look to their own actions, rather than to the actions of Jesus Christ, as the basis for their hope and confidence.

Again, conscientious Christians can sympathize in a way. All around us we see those who claim to be Christian but adopt lifestyles that are diametrically opposed to the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. The inevitable response of a shallow church is to pour its resources and energy into behavior modification and into programs that seek to establish what is regarded as social justice.

Jesus, on the other hand, repeatedly declared that His “*kingdom is not of this world.*” God obviously cares what human beings do and don’t do, but the mission of Christ was to save souls from eternal destruction in hell, not simply to correct their behavior or to bring earthly happiness into their lives. Behavior is only corrected rightly as a byproduct of saving faith, that is, when it truly is a *fruit of faith*.

Though the two terms *Puritanism* and *Pietism* have fallen into disuse in our day, the basis of both movements is still very much alive and thriving. Again, it’s the natural result of any church that shifts its attention from “*Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” to the correction of any and all social ills. The primary difference today is that churches which now practice a form of Puritanism or Pietism often promote a morality that is almost completely detached from prior Biblical standards. Where Puritans and Pietists of old attacked things like adultery and fornication, modern adherents are condemning those who promote Biblical morality. The goal is still to correct behavior, but the definition of correct behavior has been dramatically altered to the point that it does not even resemble God’s definition.

Obviously, then, this shift for the worse, in what started out as a bad theological idea, represents a symptom of the underlying problem of having a lack of depth. Depth that is grounded in the bedrock of sin and grace would have prevented the first perversions of Pietism and Puritanism, to say nothing of their modern offspring.

The perceived need for change, which was the immoral lifestyle of many who professed Christianity, did not represent a flaw in Biblical doctrine or in the true Christian faith, but a flaw in those who evidently were devoid of having true saving faith. Shortly before his death the Apostle Paul warned Timothy—and through him the entire Christian Church—of the looming menace expressed in these words of 2 Timothy 3:1-5:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

The last line here is key: “*having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.*” Pietism and Puritanism saw a problem, but badly misdiagnosed both its cause and its cure. True Christianity is the only true cure, and true Christianity can only be created and preserved by consistent focus on that which forms the basis of true Christian faith. The change has to come from the inside out, whereas both Pietism

and Puritanism have tried to fix the perceived problem from the outside in. Whereas Christ tells us to apply that which fixes the heart and then the fruits will follow, Pietism and Puritanism tell us to fix the fruits and the faith will be repaired. From there it seems an easy transition is made to the seemingly modern maxim: Fix the fruits and the faith no longer matters—which is something akin to convincing a cancer patient that make-up and a wig would not only disguise the cancer, but even cure it.

The slide into what is today a perverse form of Pietism/Puritanism was almost unavoidable. The basis for the Christian faith, God's Word, is also that which reveals God's standard of morality. By abandoning the sin and grace, law and gospel depth of God's Word, churches will invariably lose both the inner faith and the outward standard. The result is that today much of Christianity not only knows nothing of the true path to life; they have also adopted the world's sense of morality; and it is the implementation or practice of that perverse morality on which they now spend themselves. More than that, worse than that, it is also that on which they base their hope for salvation. They have become champions of the world's idea of "fairness" and "tolerance," neither of which have any real basis in God's Word.

Lack of depth promotes *sacrificial* over *sacramental*

While there are two directions for that which transpires in our worship services, confessional conservative Lutheranism has always and rightly focused on sacramental over sacrificial. *Sacramental* is roughly defined as that which God gives to or does for man, while *sacrificial* is defined as that which man gives to or does for God. Conservative Lutheranism focuses primarily on sacramental (God giving to man) precisely because we recognize our great need. Clearly both have their place, but both have to be kept in their place. This exchange between Jesus and Peter on Maundy Thursday summarizes the difference well and brings the problem into sharper focus, as recorded in [John 13:3-8](#):

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Note not only the direction, but which direction man is naturally most comfortable in going. Peter was uncomfortable with having Jesus wash his feet, with having Jesus do for him. Why was that? Peter obviously revered his Lord and therefore considered the task to be beneath Jesus. Most would see that as laudable. Peter would have been much more comfortable reversing the roles, as would we. Yet Peter desperately needed to learn to value the sacramental over the sacrificial. He needed to learn to acknowledge his own ongoing needs and weaknesses, or certain calamity would result. He needed to come to terms with the fact that salvation, of necessity and by grace, is provided for him, and then to realize that only against that backdrop does the sacrificial make any sense at all. Our praise stems from and focuses on God's grace and mercy extended to us in our desperate state as sinners against Him. With that reality in mind King David said it well: "***If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared***" (Psa. 130:3-4).

The disciples needed to see themselves as spiritual cripples in need of divine rescue, rather than their mistaken view of themselves as strong, capable peers who, working together with Jesus, would accomplish what Jesus came to do. They still did not fully grasp that "***the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many***" (Matt. 20:28).

Clearly, we know the result of Peter's misdirection. His desire to do for his Lord led him actually to oppose his Savior, and he placed himself unwittingly in the way of his own redemption, trying to prevent the Savior's death, that is, the satisfactory payment for the world's sin-debt on the cross of Calvary. Thus we hear in [Matthew 16:21-23](#):

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Opting for the sacrificial over the sacramental will always feel natural for man on account of several reasons. First, because it gives one the sense or impression that he is doing something to help himself spiritually and that he is thereby improving his standing with God. The feeling, of course, is generated by illusion rather than reality. Man buys into it because of his natural inclination to solve his own problems and provide his own solutions. Secondly, dwelling on the sacramental reminds man of his continual failure and need for rescue—something man naturally wants to forget or play down. Focusing on the sacrificial, therefore, can give the illusion not only that man is providing solutions, but also that man is not as spiritually destitute as he really is apart from his Savior. Maintaining a man-to-God direction (focusing only on or even primarily on worship, praise, offerings, etc.) also makes it much easier to turn a blind eye toward ongoing, unrepentant sin. In fact, those caught up in sin often find salve for their wounded consciences in the sacrificial, as if singing praise or giving money to the God I am otherwise willfully disobeying somehow justifies my disobedience, or somehow makes my ongoing rebellion less relevant or detrimental.

Here we find the great appeal as well as the driving force behind the current trends in modern Christianity. The trend today is toward the sacrificial rather than the sacramental, as well as a dramatic shift away from any traditional, liturgical worship format that emphasizes the sacramental (God’s grace) over the sacrificial (man’s response). The appeal of things like praise bands, testimonials, and speaking in tongues is not just that many find such things entertaining and inspiring; it is also that such things are absolutely non-judgmental. They are also quite user-friendly. No need to wrestle with definitions or meanings. No need for instruction, study, memorization, or even all that much thought. No need for caution, balance, or restraint. The brand new convert can feel as comfortable with the sacrificial as does the life-long member.

How can that be a bad thing? The problem, again, is that there are no moorings; there is no foundation. The sacramental element of Christianity is always supposed to drive the sacrificial, not the other way around. In other words, we thank and praise our God *because of what he has already done for us*. “***We love Him because he first loved us***” (1 John 4:19 NKJ). Without that order the sacrificial is all about emotion, and emotion tends to be all motor—no steering wheel and no brakes. Emotion is energy that always requires some sort of outside guidance to prevent it from morphing into fanaticism. Once the truth of God’s Word—specifically the law and the gospel—is no longer serving as both the bedrock and the guidance system, whatever man substitutes can only result in spiritual chaos.

This is why Paul worked diligently to correct the same kind of problem in Corinth. There the sacrificial had come to dominate the sacramental in certain ways. They did not lack for emotion or praise or even knowledge (1 Cor. 1:4-5), and yet the Holy Spirit through Paul chastised them for their disorder.

1 Corinthians 14:6-19 *Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I thank God that I*

Speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Speaking in tongues as practiced in Corinth was clearly sacrificial; that is, it was man to God. Note that while Paul did not condemn their speaking in tongues per se, he not only commanded them to control or regulate it, but also identified it as dramatically inferior to prophecy, which is a main component of the God-to-man sacramental element of Christian worship. He also gave reasons. First, it was prophecy that built up and instructed the other members; tongues did not. Second, tongues did nothing to help those visitors whom they were called to reach. Again, prophecy did. Third, in the sacrificial element of their worship, at least in connection with tongues, the spirit prays but the mind is unfruitful.

This unfruitfulness of the mind is undoubtedly a large part of the appeal of man-to-God over God-to-man. The former is easy—even to the point of *mindless*; the latter is not. Compare the difference between reading a science-fiction novel and reading a science textbook. The one is typically easy, entertaining, fictitious, and uninformative; the other is almost the exact opposite in every way. Rarely does natural man choose any but the path of least resistance.

Sacrificial vs. Sacramental in connection with the Sacraments

Clearly our society is more comfortable with individually stylized praise than it is with humbly admitting both sin and helplessness. It should come as no surprise, then, that such a society will also adopt a sacrificial view of the sacraments. In fact, an alarming number of Christian denominations hold to the idea that man is the one doing the good thing in baptism: committing himself to his God as an act of worship and dedication. In their view man is also supplying the good thing in the Lord's Supper by commemorating the Savior's death as commanded.

This, again, is a logical extension of perpetually seeking the easiest, quickest, least judgmental course of action. It is a natural byproduct of a lack of depth and focus on Christ crucified for sinners.

This tendency also sheds light on some of the other errors and misconceptions that taint the modern understanding of the sacraments. If one starts from the premise that baptism is sacrificial, it only makes sense to deny baptism to infants. Infants cannot make the sacrifice, i.e., the decision to dedicate themselves to their God; therefore baptism for them is inappropriate and thus denied to them. Also, then, one can trace their view that baptism has nothing to do with conversion or with the gift of the forgiveness of sins, since only one who is already a Christian can truly want to dedicate himself to his God.

As to the Lord's Supper their belief that the sacrament is a memorial feast in which Christians serve God makes it that much easier to deny that God Himself is there to give communicants His true body and blood, despite God's own words to the contrary, which we hear in Mark 14:22-24:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many." (NKJ)

The real presence becomes, at best, a moot point in their belief system. Clearly that poses difficulties when it comes to explaining Paul's warning about the misuse or improper reception of the body and blood of Christ, which is stated in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

Here again, a belief system that focuses only on the non-judgmental and the sacrificial finds it easier simply to ignore such warnings, or to label them as outdated or even misguided. Also then, more easily explained is the growing acceptance of open communion. If the Lord's Supper is something that man does for God, what right does anyone have to deny another person the opportunity to worship God, which

in their minds is the sum and substance of Holy Communion? The whole thing, in their view, becomes more a matter of human rights than Biblical doctrine.

This view, in turn, determines the age and level of understanding at which an individual should be allowed to commune. If even a child with no understanding of the real presence feels the desire to memorialize the Lord's death, what right does anyone have to deny him? No need for instruction, no need even for repentance. Just praise and commemorate. The problem, of course, is that those passages have to be ignored, twisted, or simply rewritten on the basis of human logic and experience for such things to be accepted as true.

Ungodly tolerance – the inevitable result of a lack of depth

Lack of depth sets in motion a chain reaction that is both tragic and inevitable. The true Christian faith that is based upon and clings tenaciously to Christ crucified (sin and grace, law and gospel) will naturally place greater emphasis on God-for-man (sacramental) without neglecting man-for-God (sacrificial). The basic premise of true Christianity is that man has needs that only God can supply, and it is God's supplying of those needs that is the source of our great comfort and assurance, and consequently our praise. Every other religion has as its basic premise that God has needs or requirements that *man must supply*, which invariably results in a sacrificial (man-to-God) emphasis, nearly to or entirely to the exclusion of the sacramental. In fact, the sacramental element of every work-righteous religion is restricted almost entirely to a listing of God's demands (so we know what we have to do) and what temporal blessings God has given to us (so we can adequately and accurately offer our thanksgiving).

Once a sacrificial view of religion is adopted, all that really remains is to fill in the blank as to what the individual believes his God demands of him. Disturbingly enough, man typically exhibits no reservation at defining those needs or requirements all on his own. Man evidently has no trouble saying in effect: *It's only wrong if I say it's wrong.*

Note the obvious dilemma. If *anyone* is allowed to define exactly what his Higher Power demands and condemns, then by definition *everyone* must be allowed to do so. No one human opinion can be regarded as superior to any other—at which point you have descended into the morass that was Israel under the Judges. ***“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”*** (Judges 17:6). Nor is the depth of the depravity that is possible left to our imagination. In that same section in the book of Judges we are given this example:

There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, “The 1,100 pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse, and also spoke it in my ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.” And his mother said, “Blessed be my son by the LORD.” And he restored the 1,100 pieces of silver to his mother. And his mother said, “I dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a carved image and a metal image. Now therefore I will restore it to you.” So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took 200 pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image. And it was in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest. (Judges 17:1-5).

To summarize, a man (Micah) robbed his own mother of a small fortune. Upon returning the silver, the woman dedicated a part of what was returned to the Lord by having it fashioned into a graven image. Micah then set up his own private shrine where he worshipped this and other idols, and where he ordained one of his own sons, who was not of the Aaronic priesthood, as his own family priest. From first to last this whole sordid affair was an affront to God, but Micah was evidently very proud of what he had done. He was living by the rules that he himself had made.

Notice a strange mixture of right and wrong. The worship of the Lord was on the right track, but at that time not in a private shrine and certainly not in the context of graven images. The mother's desire to give an offering was certainly good, but not in the form that she gave it. The desire to be served by a priest: Good. Ordaining a man who failed God's qualifications for such an office: Bad.

Christianity today has descended into the same befuddled perversion. God no longer is permitted to set the standards of right and wrong; man does that for himself. Predictably man's concept of morality is shaped more by society than by God.

Worse still, man takes concepts that in part conform to Biblical principles and twists them into conformity with modern customs and group-think. Boiled down to its lowest common denominator, that then means that if a human being does what society dictates to be right, that individual will have fulfilled the requirements of his God and will have qualified himself (in his own estimation) for an eternal reward.

The poster child for this twisted form of religion is the modern concept of tolerance. Most Christians are actually surprised to learn that no form of the word "tolerate" is found in most translations of the Bible. Those versions that do include some form of the word always use it in the negative sense of "do not accept." For example, it is said to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:2: "***I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false***" (NIV). It is also said to the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2:20-21: "***Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling***" (NIV). Note in this last verse how the word—the entire concept of *toleration*—is used as *condemnation* toward those who were doing what modern Christianity is demanding of all today. The members of the church in Thyatira were *condemned by God* for their *tolerance* of the prophetess Jezebel. In our day such tolerance is promoted as the pinnacle of human morality. Nothing is more "right," it is said, than declaring that nothing is wrong.

All is justified on the basis of a misguided understanding of Matthew 7:1: "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*" Even the briefest glance at the context of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount proves that Jesus is not here commanding His followers to refuse to call evil all that God Himself calls evil. In fact, the main purpose of the Sermon on the Mount was to demonstrate how impossible it is for man to keep God's Law perfectly.

Matthew 5:21-22 "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.*"

Matthew 5:27-28 "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*"

Matthew 5:43-45 "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*"

No one can give these words a fair reading and come to the conclusion that Jesus is here preaching the modern concept of tolerance. In fact, He is teaching just the opposite. His message is not: *Don't condemn anything as sinful*. It is rather: *Do not judge hypocritically or self-righteously. Recognize the evil also in your own actions and particularly in your own hearts, tolerating neither your own sin nor the sin of others*. In other words, Jesus is not preaching tolerance; He is promoting an objective and unbiased intolerance of all sin, both in us and in others. No one can champion Him as the paragon of tolerance—the One who said to the woman caught in adultery, "***Go and sin no more***" (John 8:11 NKJ).

Surely the modern concept of toleration strikes at the very heart of Christianity. Toleration presupposes that nothing is worthy of our condemnation. If nothing is worthy of condemnation, then there was no need for Jesus Christ to come to earth to do what He did. If we have no sin, we have no need of a Savior.

How difficult—to the point of impossible—it is to comprehend the true meaning and purpose of the Christian faith in the absence of the bedrock of Christ crucified *for sinners*. How natural and easy, on the other hand, to preach toleration in any worship setting that focuses almost exclusively on the sacrificial to

the abandonment of the sacramental. We are what we are and we have what we have because of what God has done and continues to do for us. Toleration makes Jesus, at best, superfluous.

Conclusion

Every aspect of our faith and worship must continue to center on the bedrock of sin and grace, law and gospel. The predominance of our focus must remain on that which God has already done for us, in Christ Jesus, and continues to carry out in us through the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace. We are and must remain a sacramental church body. The problem is not what we lack; it is that we fail to appreciate what we have.

God grant us, then, a renewed appreciation for the heritage that is ours and the invaluable trust that we have been given. The danger will always exist that we become mesmerized by those user-friendly churches that always seem to be growing and glowing in some outward sense. The perception that what we have is somehow inferior or deficient will be reinforced every time a loved one is drawn away to the shiny church on the hill or to no church at all. The solution is not to give up on the good that is our confessional Lutheran birthright, but to carry on the hard work of re-educating ourselves and others as to the “depth of the riches,” the true nature of the treasures that have been entrusted to us in the Scriptures.

Addiction: How Can Pastors and Members Help?

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* The essayist, a CLC member and physician in the Denver, CO area, presented the following at a 2011 session of the West Central Delegate Conference. Original footnotes now appear as endnotes, with endnotes 5 and 8 added by the editor. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

How often do we hear statements like these: “I’m addicted to football” or “You must be a choco-holic”? We all have that something which we just can’t seem to get enough of. For me it’s probably music. I own so many CDs that there are some which I’ve seldom heard. But when does a habit become a true addiction? What happens when someone we care about finds himself caught up in drugs or alcohol? How should we respond when a church member’s habitual behaviors become a detriment to her family and her own life? In the interest of full disclosure let it be understood that I am not an expert in behavioral sciences or mental health; but I do have a well-rounded medical background and experience assisting patients with these issues. Whether I am counseling a veteran with emphysema on the importance of smoking cessation or treating an alcoholic patient with liver disease who will die without a transplant, all too often I see what harms true addiction can bring and I work with these individuals to help them quit.

We all can probably think of people close to us who have struggled with some form of addiction. To better understand how we can help others overcome a problem such as this, we will first address the matter of defining the problem and identifying the basic mechanisms that drive addiction. Next, we’ll consider what God’s Word has to say about the matter and how we should react to someone who is addicted. Finally, we’ll discuss how we can best serve others in this regard and also consider some strategies that we can employ.

It is important to begin with some definitions. *Addiction* is a lay term that means “the state of being enslaved to a practice or habit” (*Random House Dictionary* 2011). This word is quite loaded and doesn’t tell us much about the problem; so the medical literature does not use this term much. In its place we consider two other terms: *dependence* and *abuse*.

“Dependence” is defined as the presence of three or more of the following in the *DSM-IV* (the medical manual that defines all mental health disorders):¹

1. Tolerance: Developing a tolerance to the substance/behavior such that you need more and more for the same effect;
2. Withdrawal: Absence of the substance/behavior leads to physical or psychological withdrawal;

3. Overuse: Using larger amounts than what was intended;
4. Desire to cut back;
5. Time: A great deal of time is used in pursuit of the substance/behavior;
6. Activities are given up due to the habit;
7. Persistent use despite knowing the negative effects.

These are the things to look for when trying to understand the scope of the problem. For example, physicians are taught to screen patients for alcohol dependency using the CAGE questions:² Have you thought about **Cutting back**? Are you **Annoyed** by others who criticize your drinking? Have you felt **Guilty** about drinking? Have you needed an **Eye-opener** in the morning (to prevent withdrawal, etc.)? These questions and other tools draw directly from the definition of dependency.

Abuse is essentially dependence that also has clear interference in the individual's personal life. Warning signs of abuse include:

1. Failure to fulfill obligations at work/home/church/school, etc.;
2. Getting into hazardous situations (physical danger);
3. Legal problems;
4. Interpersonal problems such as recurrent arguments, separation/divorce, etc.

Someone who is abusing a substance or a behavior is causing clear harm to himself or herself and yet the habit continues. We distinguish abuse from dependency because those with abuse arguably have a greater need for help.

What can be misused or abused? I have alluded to two broad categories: substances and behaviors. The *DSM-IV* (and my training) predominantly addresses substances of abuse. These include alcohol, marijuana, amphetamines, cocaine, heroin, etc. Due to their different properties and potencies the withdrawal pattern and the strength of the addiction can vary quite widely. For example, nicotine is a substance that often leads to dependence but seldom leads to abuse, whereas marijuana is not associated with any particular withdrawal symptoms.

Sometimes a behavior can be just as addictive as a drug. Some examples include gambling, pornography, and binge eating.³ Some psychologists may argue that many other vices can be labeled as "addictions" as well. Regardless, as Christians we know that we are all slaves to sin in general, as Jesus said in John 8:34: "*Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.*"

However, I believe that truly being dependent upon or abusing a substance or behavior is more complicated than simply being a sinner. There may well be a gray area here, which I have no intention to delineate. I propose that such questions are best addressed on an individual basis with God's Word open as the guide and the source of spiritual healing. Ultimately, we are all sinners and all need to hear God's Word in both Law and Gospel to guide us on our Christian walk and especially to maintain our spiritual life as His believing children.

As some additional background to understanding addiction, especially substance abuse, I want to discuss neurotransmitters very briefly. The brain consists of roughly 100 billion neurons, or nerve cells, that are all intricately interconnected. They can send signals to one other extremely quickly, using more than a half-dozen signaling molecules called neurotransmitters. Many drugs of abuse act directly on this communication system. For example, dopamine is the neuro-transmitter thought to be responsible for the basic reward pathway in the brain, which in essence tells you: "That was good, you should do that again." Drugs such as cocaine and amphetamines directly affect this pathway, essentially "hard-wiring" someone to use these substances again and again. Alcohol may lower inhibitions in part because it acts on the GABA receptor of the brain, decreasing the activity of the signals that tell us: "Don't do that, something bad might happen," and so we say or do whatever pops into our heads.⁴ This is not to say that substance users have no control over or responsibility for their actions. But clearly it can be much more difficult to make the right decision. So we see how manipulation of the neurotransmitters in our brains can work against us to promote the onset of addiction.

Considered on a higher level, it is crucial to acknowledge the situations that can promote addiction. When dealing with someone who is abusing or dependent upon a substance or behavior, we are likely to encounter many of the following issues.

Denial is often a central problem. The individual may say things like: “This is not really a problem,” or “I can quit any time I want to.” Those close to the individual may fall into the same trap. This issue will need to be addressed before any progress can be made.

Enabling occurs when loved ones do something that promotes the habit in question. Often they are unaware that their actions are actually reinforcing the individual’s addiction. Examples of enabling include taking on the responsibilities that an alcoholic person has forsaken, bringing large quantities of junk food to an overeater too obese to leave the house, or leading someone to think that his methamphetamine habit is nothing serious. Sometimes as difficult or as loveless as it may seem, allowing someone to endure the consequences, i.e., the full burden of his or her mistakes, helps to hasten their decision to change.

Mental health disorders are beyond the scope of this essay, but these are possibly the most important complicating factor. People struggling with depression often will self-medicate with alcohol. Bipolar disorder is characterized by manic episodes, periods of unusually heightened mood, which often feature substance abuse and any number of behavioral indiscretions. Delusions, or fixed false beliefs, are central to schizophrenia and can be incredibly tormenting. Patients often turn to cigarettes, marijuana, alcohol, and other drugs to help them cope. The first step to helping these people is to address the underlying psychiatric disorder, which very often requires the care of a mental health professional.

Other circumstances may also be driving someone’s dependency or abuse. Bereavement, a stressful work environment, or other social pressures can lead some to substances or behaviors as an attempt to escape. There can even be genetic factors involved. Alcoholism, for example, has been shown to run in families regardless of their environment.

Throughout the medical and behavioral science literature the abuse of substances or behaviors is considered to be an illness. Regardless of one’s opinion about that classification, it is certainly not an illness that is easily cured, like an ear infection with a short course of medication.⁵ Rather, it is helpful to compare it to a familiar chronic disease such as diabetes. With rare exceptions the focus on treatment of diabetes is not eradication of diabetes but instead learning how to live with it and how to minimize its harms. Often significant lifestyle changes are required. If diabetes progresses unchecked, major harm can occur, which is often identified only when it is too late. With this construct in mind we will consider how we can help our fellow Christian deal with addiction.

First, we need to consider prayerfully and turn humbly to God’s Word for guidance on this matter. The temptation is strong to consider ourselves somehow above this problem of addiction. One may think, “This would never happen to me,” or “I would never allow things to get this bad,” or even “That person must not have very strong faith if he is in this situation.” If we are to discuss openly another Christian’s addiction with him or her, we need to make it clear that we are doing so with genuine humility and concern. Such a demeanor and approach are certainly appropriate when we consider the following passages:

Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Matthew 7:4-5: “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Similarly, if someone is returning to the church after a notable absence and looking for help with a vice such as substance abuse, we should not react with disdain or an I-told-you-so attitude. Rather, we should heed the parable lessons of Jesus in Luke 15. I envision that the prodigal son did not deliberately squander his wealth, but rather was ensnared by evils such as alcohol abuse, fornication, gambling, and the like. It was not until he had hit rock bottom that he humbly returned to his father for help. Likewise, our first reaction when confronting addiction should be to rejoice that the Lord has guided a lost sheep back to the fold.

Sin is clearly at the root of addiction, particularly the sin of egocentrism, which is focusing on one’s own desires. Recalling the aforementioned passage from the Gospel of John, we bear in mind that the Christian with substance dependence is simply another slave of sin as we all are; however, the pattern of abuse often makes this enslavement more evident to the observer.

In Romans 7:19-20 we read: “*For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*” Often while preparing this essay, I was reminded of these verses, which, of course, apply to all Christians, but should be of particular import to those battling addictions. It is a comfort to know that one is not alone in this battle, but that even the Apostle Paul felt the stress and strain of battling with the sinful flesh and losing. That same apostle also wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

Virtually all the vices discussed above have detrimental effects on the individual’s body. Alcohol damages the brain and the liver; cigarette smoke irreversibly scars the lungs and increases the risk of cancer; cocaine can lead to heart attacks; and those who abuse any substance often neglect their bodies’ basic needs.

With such in mind we can take to heart what the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:24-26:

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

While I am no Greek scholar, I have read that the verb here, translated “come to their senses,” is the Greek word *ananepho*: to become sober again. This verse not only guides us in how we should approach someone struggling with addiction, but also makes important points for the individual. We need God to grant repentance, and to become sober in mind and heart (and in body) is to escape Satan’s traps for us.

Ultimately, this becomes an opportunity for us to remind the individual that “*without Him—Christ—we can do nothing*” (John 15:5). As powerless as one can feel to overcome an addiction, it is vitally important to emphasize everything that God has done for us. Our redemption has already been accomplished by Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross. The Holy Spirit continues to work and preserve saving faith in our hearts. God will guide us through our daily Christian walk, causing us to “*will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Phil. 2:13). Likewise, when Christians are actively toiling against the Old Adam to overcome these temptations, they will be encouraged when they remember the Spirit-given exhortation of this verse:

1 Corinthians 10:13: *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

Here we are reminded that we are never alone in fighting a particular temptation. Many others have struggled with the same problems before. Also, we should not despair and give in to the habit because the addiction is just too powerful, or genetic, or “hard-wired”; but rather we should approach each new temptation looking for the way of escape through prayer, through study of God’s Word, and reaching out to our fellow Christians, realizing that our merciful God filters out all the temptations that we are not able to bear.

An effective professional counselor undertakes years of dedicated study and many months of practical experience before learning the skills necessary for the job. While it is certainly an unrealistic goal to provide such training here today, we will review some fundamentals of confronting addiction and working through it. The first task is to assess someone’s readiness to make a change. This is often easy to do: Simply ask someone how they feel about the habit in question. The response indicates one of the stages summarized below:⁶

- 1) **Precontemplation**: enjoys the habit and does not want to change;
- 2) **Contemplation**: identifies need for change but not ready to act;
- 3) **Preparation**: is ready to act but is unsure how;
- 4) **Action**: “quitting” is a new and active process with dynamic challenges that one might need help with;
- 5) **Maintenance**: considers himself or herself reformed but the temptation always remains.

I use these five stages all the time to address my patients' tobacco use. The stages dictate the most appropriate intervention for the person at that point in time. For example, it is unrealistic to expect someone to take action against an addiction until he or she is at the preparation stage. Below is a set of suggested approaches to someone struggling with addiction based on which stage they are in:

- 1) **Precontemplation:** Sow seeds of discontent, point out benefits of quitting or the harms of continuing the substance/behavior;
- 2) **Contemplation:** Resolve the ambivalence over the habit by exploring why feelings are mixed and emphasizing the benefits of cessation;
- 3) **Preparation:** Help identify specific strategies to quit and implement them (or identify someone else who can help);
- 4) **Action:** Explore what barriers or relapse triggers exist and address them;
- 5) **Maintenance:** Both you and the individual need to keep in mind that one is never "cured" of addiction; continue vigilance and discuss ongoing struggles openly.

You can also clarify the scope of the problem. Is this simply a matter of dependence on a substance, or are problems with everyday function arising? To what extent does this impact their health, interpersonal relationships, finances, or legal situation? This can give you a sense of how urgent or aggressive an intervention should be.

It is also very important to identify underlying mental illness. The easiest way to find out if someone is depressed is to ask them: Do you have pleasure doing things you would typically enjoy? Or even this: Do you think you might be depressed? Health care providers screen for depression by asking about the following:

- 1) change in sleep,
- 2) losing interest in hobbies,
- 3) feelings of guilt or worthlessness,
- 4) decreased energy,
- 5) impaired concentration,
- 6) change in appetite,
- 7) feeling weighed down physically, or
- 8) thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

People with bipolar disorder (manic depression) may have the above symptoms but also have periods of very high energy and mood with little sleep, or heightened self-importance, or engage in risky or irresponsible behavior (e.g., giving all one's money away, getting involved in physical altercations, etc.). Psychotic disorders have some sort of identifiable delusion: a fixed false belief that you cannot overturn with logic or evidence ("The government is controlling my mind through my fillings"). This is a very rudimentary framework, but it provides clues for you to identify. If any of these are present, the individual needs a psychiatric assessment. Without treating the mental illness, addressing the addiction will be unsuccessful.

I wish to share some strategies and tips I use when confronting someone with an addiction and when helping him or her kick the habit. The list is by no means exhaustive. First, enlist the help of friends and family, whether you are working to help someone in the precontemplative stage (see above) recognize the harms of the addiction, or you are formulating a quitting strategy. Every person that you bring into the loop adds accountability and can provide strength during the action stage (see above) if the individual falters.

The question of how best to quit varies, depending upon the substance or behavior and also from person to person. That being said, with a few specific exceptions quitting "cold turkey" is usually the way to go. As an aside the term "cold turkey" refers to what it feels like to go through withdrawal from heroin or other opioid pain medications. The gooseflesh, shaking chills, and tremors can be absolutely miserable, but the withdrawal from these drugs is seldom a true health risk. Too often I see patients who want to taper tobacco or alcohol very gradually, but because they don't have a clear stopping point in mind, they inevitably lose sight of their goal.

The substances that may be unsafe to quit instantly are alcohol and sedative medications called benzodiazepines or barbiturates. Those with heavier use are more at risk of negative withdrawal, which can include tremor, agitation, hallucinations, seizures, and death. If someone is ready to quit drinking alcohol but has a substantial daily intake (or has have had withdrawal symptoms before), he should seek the aid of a physician, or at least taper down over days to weeks.

One aspect that is often neglected when attempting cessation is the person's environment. A smoker whose spouse continues to smoke in the home will have a very difficult time quitting. An alcoholic man whose only social meeting place is a bar will soon be isolated from his friends or back in the bar drinking again. The substance or behavior needs to be as inaccessible as possible, and this usually requires a complete change, to the point of moving away from the alcoholic roommate or finding all new friends. Such changes are certainly in line with the counsel of God's Word.

1 Corinthians 15:33: *Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."*

Proverbs 6:27 (in speaking of adultery): *Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?*

For most people who decide to break with their addiction, there is a wake-up call, a decisive moment that brings everything into perspective. With my patients who are still precontemplative, sometimes it's the diagnosis of cancer or realizing the possibility of cancer. For others it's the development of an irreversible organ dysfunction such as heart or liver failure. Maybe it's the ending of a marriage or other meaningful relationship. One can reframe these tragic events as a clear message that now is the time to quit.

While a Christian may turn first to a pastor or elder of the church when struggling with addiction, it may be more than one person can manage, regardless of their training. There are many resources available that can help.

Rehabilitation centers often seem like an ideal solution to the problem. Bringing someone to a controlled environment with intense counseling is intended to give them every opportunity to succeed. This may be especially desirable when there may be physiologic withdrawal from a substance, which trained staff members can help the individual manage. There are several problems with rehabilitation, however. The treatment can be quite expensive, and some health insurance providers do not pay for it. Also, success within the controlled environment may not prepare them for the sudden shift back to reality and all the temptations that come with it.

Physicians, be they psychiatrists or primary care providers, also have much to offer. We've already considered the importance of identifying and treating underlying mental illness. Primary doctors may not have much time for one-on-one counseling, but they are well trained to characterize the situation and involve the right people who can help. They also may consider substitution therapy (replacing the abused substance with a safer medication), which often requires a prescription and is a useful tool in combating such strong habits. Nicotine replacement is often available over the counter, but instructions from a physician can help ensure that it is used correctly to increase the chance of success. Disulfiram (Antabuse) is a medication that inhibits the body's ability to metabolize alcohol, leaving the drinker feeling ill instead of intoxicated. Methadone and other similar medications work the same way that heroin or opioid painkillers work, but they do not cause the same highs or lows and can lessen the high if the opioid is used again.

A very effective and somewhat more affordable strategy is counseling. This may take several sessions to make progress and therefore may not be suited to someone in need of a more urgent intervention. This approach can be successful because the individual has someone actively listening and formulating a tailored plan of action and identifying what specific pitfalls that individual should expect.

If someone approaches you for help with an addiction, they may be more comfortable working through their issues with you rather than with a psychologist or psychiatrist whom they do not know. If you find yourself providing more structured counseling and are uncomfortable with this, there are many books available to help. One such resource, *Doing What Works in Brief Therapy*, can be skimmed in one or two hours.⁷ It contains dialogue of many example encounters and pointers on how to direct the discussion.

Another aid to substance abuse recovery is Alcoholics Anonymous and its derivatives (Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, etc.). Anyone not familiar with the program could request to attend a meeting as an observer to have a better understanding of what it entails. It has many desirable elements. Groups are quite prevalent and can be found in many communities across America. There is essentially no cost to the participant (although they may take a collection). They have high success rates (although they do not make this publicly available). New participants are often paired with a reformed alcoholic or user for additional support and accountability. They do refer to alcoholism as a “spiritual disease” and recognize a Higher Power in their materials and sessions. This can potentially pose fellowship issues; prayer is often part of the meeting.⁸ Because the organization is decentralized, the experience at one AA meeting may be very different from that at another location. Ultimately this is a decision for the individual to consider carefully and prayerfully with the pastor.

Regardless of the tools used to combat addiction, recovery is a very difficult journey and relapse back to the substance or behavior is common. It’s easy for the individual or those helping him or her to get discouraged when relapses occur, but this should be expected. I have patients who have to quit smoking half a dozen times or more before they have quit for good. Rather than thinking that it’s back to square one, we should emphasize the successes and try to find out why relapse occurred so that he or she can avoid the same snare the next time.

Of course, the most important tool of all is God’s Word. I have already outlined some verses that I find to be especially applicable. Those who are abusing or dependent upon substances or addictive behaviors need, first, to be reminded of their sin through the Law.

Isaiah 5:11: *Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them!*

Luke 21:34: *“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.”*

James 1:13-15: *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

1 Corinthians 6:9-10: *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

But lest we lead someone into despair, we also must provide the blessed Gospel message. As Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 6:11:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

He exhorts the same power and influence of the Spirit, along with the support of fellow Christians when says in Ephesians 5:18-21:

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

The balance to be made in applying Law and Gospel depends in part on the individual. Are we dealing with a contrite member of the church who has a heavy burden of guilt, or is it someone who is not well acquainted with his Savior and sees no real harm in his substance abuse? Ultimately, we know that no one can say it better than the Holy Spirit Himself. Therefore we should sit down with the individual and pore over the Scriptures for guidance.

James 1:12: *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”*

Endnotes

¹ American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Ed., Text Revision (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000) 197.

² J. A. Ewing. "Detecting Alcoholism: The CAGE Questionnaire." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 252 (1984): 1905-1907.

³ B. J. Sadock et al. *Kaplan and Sadock's Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioral Sciences/Clinical Psychiatry* (Synopsis of Psychiatry), 10th Ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, 2007) 788.

⁴ D. L. Kasper, E. Braunwald, A. S. Fauci, S. L. Hauser, D. L. Longo, and J. L. Jameson. *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine*, 16th Ed. 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill Medical Publishing, 2005) 2339-40.

⁵ In regard to alcoholism note the following in *The Counseling Shepherd* (Schuetze/Matzke, Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1988): "Whether alcoholism is in the same sense a disease has not been answered definitively. But the alcoholic cannot predict how much he is going to drink once he begins. He is involved in addictive, uncontrollable use of alcohol. Whether this is physical or psychological, it generally requires treatment and permits us to call it a disease. This does not remove the moral factor that the excessive use, or destructive abuse, of alcohol in any circumstance is sinful" (p. 189).

⁶ See the following link: <http://nicotinefreedom.com/articles/readiness-to-change>.

⁷ Ellen K. Quick. *Doing What Works in Brief Therapy: A Strategic Solution Focused Approach*. 2nd ed. 2008 (1996). Elsevier Academic Press.

⁸ There may be other concerns with the approach of Alcoholics Anonymous. One example can be found in *The Counseling Shepherd* on page 191: "Of major concern is AA's so-called 'god': 'I don't like the generic faceless god and lack of Christ in AA. Without Christ the program develops self-righteousness'" [said one counselor interviewed by the authors].

More Translated Treasures

In recent issues we have attempted to make our readers more aware of the many theological treasures from the past that have been recently published in English translations or editions. In our church body we can be grateful to our God for these translations, given the fact that our college and seminary no longer include in their curricula any studies in Latin and German, the languages most often used by Martin Luther and the Lutheran writers who followed him. But now we have more of Luther, Chemnitz, Brenz, Flacius, and Gerhard in English than ever before. The books keep coming. Below is a listing of some recent volumes not commented on previously, together with a few brief remarks on their contents.

Matthias Flacius (Illyricus): *How to Understand the Sacred Scriptures (from Clavis Scripturae Sacrae, Chapters 1-4)*, translated by Wade Johnston; Magdeburg Press, Saginaw, MI, 2011; paperback, 118 pages.

The introduction by Jack Kilcrease gives us the historical background to help readers understand the life and work of Matthias Flacius. There is no doubt that Flacius was one of the most influential and productive theologians in the years following Luther's death. If it had not been for the heroic stand of Flacius and his associates against the Augsburg and the Leipzig Interims and against the feeble leadership of Philip Melancthon in those dangerous times, the benefits of the Reformation might well have been lost by the next generation. Although Flacius himself fell into error on the terminology connected with the doctrine of original sin, his stance on adiaphora was fully adopted in the *Book of Concord* in 1580. This volume, an excerpt from Flacius' larger work (translated *Key of Sacred Scripture*), is a primer on Biblical hermeneutics and still worthwhile reading after all these years.

Matthias Flacius (Illyricus): *Adiaphora and Tyranny—On Christian Resistance and Confession in the Adiaphoristic Controversy*, translated by Wade Johnston; Magdeburg Press, Saginaw, MI, 2011; hard cover, 299 pages and 16 preliminary pages.

Article X of the *Formula of Concord* stands as the most important contribution of Flacius to confessional Lutheran practical theology. The Adiaphoristic Controversy pitted Flacius and his associates against Philip Melanchthon and his adherents in the bitter controversy that erupted shortly after Luther's death. In the words of the Epitome (Article X): "The question was whether . . . certain ceremonies that had been abolished (as in themselves indifferent matters neither commanded nor forbidden by God) could be revived under the pressure and demand of the opponents, and whether compromise with them in such ceremonies and indifferent matters would be proper" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb and Wengert, p. 515).

In his fear of persecution Melanchthon favored compromise, but Flacius rallied loyal Lutherans to oppose Melanchthon's policies. The writings of Flacius translated in this book are among the strong words that were needed at the time to counter the arguments of the highly respected Melanchthon, who was Luther's closest friend and associate during Luther's life. Perhaps no one else at that time would have had the courage or intelligence to do battle with Melanchthon. Flacius believed he had no other choice, and under God's guidance his strong position prevailed, which helped to preserve confessional Lutheran theology for several more generations. Our generation needs to listen to Flacius once more, and it is good that now, for the first time, Flacius can speak to us at length on these matters in English.

John Thompson, Editor: *Genesis 1-11 (Reformation Commentary on Scripture—Old Testament I)*; InterVarsity Press Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2012; hard cover, 389 pages and 70 preliminary pages.

Carl Beckwith, Editor: *Ezekiel, Daniel (Reformation Commentary on Scripture—Old Testament XII)*; InterVarsity Press Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2012; hard cover, 452 pages and 59 preliminary pages.

Graham Tomlin, Editor: *Philippians, Colossians (Reformation Commentary on Scripture—New Testament XI)*, InterVarsity Press Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2013, hard cover, 297 pages and 57 preliminary pages.

A review in the *Journal of Theology* of December 2012 (pp. 40-43) introduced our readers to the first volume in the new commentary series called *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*. Three more volumes are now in print, as listed above. The commentary on Genesis 1-11 includes comments by Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, John Brenz, David Chytraeus, Nikolaus Selnecker, and Christoph Pelargus (1563-1633), many of them translated into English for the first time. It is refreshing to read commentary on Genesis that accept the words of Moses as given to him by God and describing real history, rather than myth or fantasy or fiction, as is assumed and promoted by many contemporary scholars.

Not many comments by Lutherans are included in the commentary on Ezekiel. Some selections come from Martin Luther, and a few from Martin Chemnitz, Johann Gerhard, and Jakob Raupius (1604-1677), a Lutheran pastor who wrote numerous commentaries on Old Testament books.

Lutheran commentators on Daniel include Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, Martin Chemnitz, Johann Gerhard, and especially Johann Wigand (1523-1587), who worked side by side with Flacius in the Adiaphoristic Controversy, but did not follow Flacius in his error concerning original sin. Some of the opinions of these Reformation scholars on these difficult prophetic books have not survived the test of time, but they are interesting nevertheless.

The Lutheran commentator quoted most often in the commentary on Philippians is George Major (1502-1574), who was a prominent teacher at the University of Wittenberg. His comments on Philippians appear in this volume to be entirely orthodox and evangelical, although in his later years he went astray by defending the dangerous proposition that good works are necessary to salvation. This false statement led to what is called the Majoristic Controversy, which was settled in 1577 by the *Formula of Concord*. Other Lutheran commentators quoted in the Philippians volume include John Bugenhagen, John Brenz, Philip Melanchthon, Martin Chemnitz, and Martin Luther.

Philip Melanchthon wrote a commentary on Colossians that is quoted extensively in the above-

listed volume on Philippians and Colossians. Of this commentary Luther wrote in his preface: "I truly cherish such books of Master Philip more than my own. . . . My books are very stormy and more warlike. . . . But Master Philip follows carefully and quietly and enjoys building and planting, sowing and watering . . . according to the gifts that God has richly given to him" (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 59, pp. 249-250).

Johann Gerhard: *On the Church (Theological Commonplaces XXV)*, translated by Richard Dinda; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2010; hard cover, 870 pages and 17 preliminary pages.

Johann Gerhard: *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity (Theological Commonplaces: Exegesis II and III)*, translated by Richard Dinda; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2007; hard cover, 484 pages and 12 preliminary pages.

Johann Gerhard: *On the Nature of Theology and on Scripture (Theological Commonplaces: Exegesis I)*, translated by Richard Dinda; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2009; hard cover, 606 pages and 19 preliminary pages.

These three volumes were early entries in Concordia's mammoth series on the *Theological Commonplaces* of Johann Gerhard. Reviews of Gerhard's two books on ministry were printed in the March 2012 and December 2012 issues of the *Journal of Theology*. We have not yet delved into the contents of these three meaty volumes.

Though not the first to be published, the volume on the nature of theology and on Scripture is intended to be the first volume in the Gerhard series. The publisher's preface states: "Gerhard's insistence that we can know and confess doctrine purely and that we must reject error runs contrary to the spirit of relativism and pluralism that engulfs much of modern Christianity" (p. ix).

The editor of these volumes, Benjamin Mayes, has this to say in his preface to the volume on the nature of God and the Trinity: "It was a great joy to work through the commonplaces on the nature of God and on the most holy mystery of the Trinity. Different as these two commonplaces are—the former making significant use of reason and philosophy, the latter relying almost exclusively on biblical exegesis—they are united in their opposition, above all, to the errors of the 'Photinians,' the early modern Unitarians who are sometimes called 'Socinians'" (p. 1x). Since much of what is called Christianity in America is really Unitarianism, with many so-called Christians avoiding mention of Christ in order not to offend non-Christians, Gerhard's studies should prove to be very helpful.

The editor's preface to the volume on the church contains the interesting remark that "though this commonplace is one of Gerhard's longest, it does not cover everything that might be desired in a doctrine of the church. Gerhard does not deal in detail with church government, church membership, fellowship with heterodox churches (unionism), the church's relationship with the state, nor its political voice. . . . This commonplace deals almost totally with the Roman Catholic view of the church" (p. xiv). If Gerhard were writing today, his volume would no doubt have to be many times as long as it is in order to cover the topic thoroughly from our perspective.

Soren Kierkegaard: *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, translated by Sylvia Walsh; Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2011; hard cover, 147 pages.

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is known for his philosophy rather than for Lutheran orthodoxy. Nevertheless, he was a practicing Lutheran. The translator's 33-page introduction points out that Fridays were Kierkegaard's "favorite time to take communion in his native city of Copenhagen, where communion services were regularly held in Lutheran churches on Fridays, Sundays, and holy days" (p. 1). "Kierkegaard described himself as 'a poet who flies to grace' and repeatedly characterized himself as a 'penitent' in his own personal religious life" (p. 6). According to Sylvia Walsh, "reconciliation with God and Christ through the consciousness and forgiveness of sin constitutes the centerpiece of both his

theology and his life" (p. 6).

The basic subject matter of these discourses is the need for confession of sin and trust in the absolution provided by the reception of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. It seems that Kierkegaard accepted the confessional Lutheran teaching that Christ Himself is personally present substantially or bodily, although invisibly, in the elements of bread and wine (p. 23).

There are many things in Kierkegaard's writings that are otherwise troublesome for the Christian, but we can hope that these discourses represent his true attitude towards his own sin and the absolution of Christ mediated through the Lord's Supper. In the last discourse translated on these pages he prays to Christ: "Therefore my Lord and Savior, . . . when I am quite sensible of my sin and the multitude of my sins, when before justice in heaven there is only wrath over me and over my life, . . . I will not begin the futile attempt that surely only leads either deeper into despair or to madness, but I will flee at once to you, and you will not deny me the hiding place you have lovingly offered to all. . ." (pp. 142-3). He then closes his discourse with a meditation in which he presents Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.

C. F. W. Walther: *Law & Gospel—How to Read and Apply the Bible (Walther's Works)*, translated by Christian Tiews; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2010; hard cover, 514 pages and 78 preliminary pages.

I was in error when I asserted in the December 2012 *Journal of Theology* (p. 51) that Walther's book on church and ministry was the first in the new series of Walther's writings that is being published by Concordia. The truth is that the first volume in the new series was published already in 2010, namely, Walther's famous book entitled *Law & Gospel*. Perhaps all of our readers are familiar with William Dau's English translation of 1929, entitled *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*. Dau's volume was not a literal translation of the classroom notes previously available in German. This new and more literal translation by Christian Tiews updates and improves Dau's translation. The volume also includes an essay on Walther's place in Lutheran history, as well as an overview of law and gospel, together with various helpful appendices and indexes. The value of Walther's lectures on this important aspect of the pastoral ministry is proved by the fact that his notes have been in constant use for over 100 years. This volume should help to extend their usefulness for another century or two, if God so wills.

C. F. W. Walther: *Gospel Sermons, Volume 1 (Walther's Works)*, translated by Donald Heck; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2013; hard cover, 305 pages and 18 preliminary pages.

This is the third volume of the new edition of *Walther's Works* to appear in print. It is a translation of the first part of an 1870 publishing of Walther's sermons on the standard Gospel lessons of the church year. It (Vol. 1) contains his sermons for the festival half of the church year—from the First Sunday in Advent to Pentecost (Vol. 2 presumably will contain his sermons for the Trinity Sundays). Pastor Donald Heck's translation was first published in 1955. The foreword, written by Pastor Heck's son, declares: "While the sermonic style of Walther will seem quite different from the typical sermon of today, the theological content of his sermons will remain relevant, since Scripture always remains relevant" (p. ix).

Bo Giertz: *Then Fell the Lord's Fire: New Life in Ministry—Ordination Sermons and Essays on Pastoral Theology and Practice*, translated by Bror Erickson; Magdeburg Press, Saginaw, MI, 2012, hard cover, 266 pages and 8 preliminary pages.

As the Church of Sweden fell far away from confessional Lutheranism in the last century, Bishop Bo Giertz of the Church of Sweden did what he could to resist that trend and was maligned for his confessional stance. He is best known today for *The Hammer of God*, his fictional presentation of the pastoral ministry in various eras of Swedish history. Two years before the bishop's death in 1998 there was published in Sweden a collection of Bo Giertz's ordination addresses and essays on pastoral theology.

Bror Erickson has now translated these into English with the title as listed above. The ordination addresses were given in the years of 1952 to 1972. In the essays the experienced bishop directed his counsel to the younger pastors in his diocese to help them in fulfilling their ministries.

In order to show the practical value of this book for our pastors today, consider here an excerpt from an ordination address on Luke 5:5:

One sows, and some falls on the path, some on the stony ground, some among the thorns. There are times when one thinks like the prophet: "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity" (Isa. 49:4 ESV). A fisher of men I would have been, but how few I have caught. How many times have I not sat up and worked into the late hours of the night to have a full and well-grounded message to come with. And the result? I have caught nothing.

"But"—and here it is a big "but," as every pastor has learned in the Lord's service. "But at Your word I will let down the nets."

"But at Your word. . ." Despite everything, without questioning, after setbacks in the past and improbabilities just now, at Your word, only at Your word, Lord. This is sufficient basis to dare to take the first unfamiliar steps in the office, sufficient basis to continue through the years, sufficient basis to keep going when your faith is tested to the extreme. (pp. 110-11)

Robert Rahn: *Jesus Never Fails—An Autobiography and History of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation*; Lutheran Heritage Foundation, Macomb, MI, 2012; paperback, 335 pages.

Along with the translated works this book is included here because it describes the formation and operation of an organization dedicated to the translation of confessional Lutheran writings into 90 or more different languages in the world. The first part of the book takes us back to rural Minnesota, the birthplace of the founder of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, Robert Rahn. After his ordination in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Pastor Rahn held various positions in the pastoral and teaching ministries until he found himself without a call in 1992. It was at that time that he began asking himself the question: "What about translating and publishing Lutheran books and materials to help restore Lutheranism? How about an organization that would have this as its sole endeavor?" (p. 32). With the support of such Lutheran leaders as Wallace Schulz, Robert Preus, and Jack Cascione, Rahn established the Lutheran Heritage Foundation in Cleveland, Ohio, on November 10, 1992, for this very purpose. Since then the organization has managed to survive through tough times and false starts and various hindrances to become a positive force in the spread of the Gospel through translations of confessional Lutheran literature, such as Luther's *Small Catechism* and the entire *Book of Concord*. An appendix (pp. 327-335) lists the 611 publications in 73 languages available as of January 2012. Much work has been done in the eastern European languages, as well as in many different languages of Africa and Asia.

- David Lau