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Exodus in the New Testament

David Lau

Exodus Sermon #15

Readings: Exodus 33:12-23 (*God's presence promised to Moses and Israel*)
Exodus 34:1-9 (*God proclaimed His name to Moses*)

Sermon Texts: John 5:45-47; John 7:19; Acts 13:38-49

John 5:45-47 [Jesus speaking]: “Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

John 7:19: “Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”

Acts 13:38-49 [Paul speaking]: “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: ‘Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.’” So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

God's words to the children of Israel were as clear and as plain as they could be. “You shall have no other gods before Me; you shall not make for yourself a carved image; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.” But what did the children of Israel do? While Moses was up on Mt. Sinai with God, they made

a golden calf; they called this calf their Lord and made sacrifices to it.

God therefore threatened to destroy His people. He said to Moses, **“Let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.”** Moses immediately pleaded with God to forgive His sinful people. **“Turn from Your fierce wrath,”** Moses said. Remember the promises that You made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You cannot break Your Word. **“So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.”**

Even more amazing than God’s eternal power and wisdom is the wonder of GOD’S FORGIVING GRACE AND COMPASSION. That grace and compassion were there already in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve fell into sin. His grace and compassion were there at Mt. Sinai after God’s people worshipped the golden calf and also at Mt. Calvary when our Lord Jesus prayed from the cross: **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”** God’s forgiving grace and compassion are still present among us today – in the Word of the Gospel and in the sacraments of the New Testament, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Shortly after the golden calf incident Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory. God said that Moses could not see God’s face of glory, for no man can see the fullness of God’s glory and live. But God did say that He would reveal and proclaim His name to Moses. So **“the LORD passed before Moses, and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation.’”**

What is God’s name? What does He reveal as His identity? Not just that He is a holy and powerful God who punishes sin. God also wants us to think of Him, above all, as a gracious, compassionate, forgiving God. **“God is love.”** God is mercy. God is grace. God forgives the sins of His people.

Now we may wonder why God bothered to give His people the Law, the Ten Commandments, and then immediately forgave them when they broke these commandments. How can we respect a God who threatens to punish people and then changes His mind and lets them go? For the answer to questions such as these, we turn to our texts from the New Testament, where we find a discussion of the purpose and intention of God’s Law, as well as the reason why God forgives His people.

Our Lord Jesus had many conversations with the Jewish leaders of His time, who considered themselves experts in all matters pertaining to God’s Law. On one such occasion He said to them: **“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust.”** The Jews knew the Law of Moses, and they trusted that their knowledge of the Law made them better than others and would insure their eternal inheritance. They thought among themselves: “Of course, I shall be saved, for we are God’s people; we have His law and commandments.” That is how they trusted in Moses, much like the Pharisee did in the Temple when he thanked God that he was better than others in his understanding and keeping of God’s Law. But Jesus said: “Moses accuses you.” Their trust in Moses was foolish, for the Law of Moses accused and condemned them. And in fact, that was and is the very purpose of God’s Law.

So also, on another occasion Jesus said to the Jews: **“Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”** The Law of God was not given as something in which we can put our trust. The Law accuses us of wrongdoing. God says that we don’t keep His law. The Law says: **“You shall not kill.”** But the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus, contrary to the Law. How then could they trust in the Law or their obedience to the Law?

The same thing is true of us. We know God’s commandments pretty well, I suppose, but do we keep them? How many of us who are children have perfectly honored and obeyed our parents in this past week? How many of us have always remembered to praise and thank the Lord for all our blessings? How many of us have been praying to Him regularly and devotedly? Are there those among us who have been taking God’s name in vain by cursing or swearing? We hear that much of the language used by our young people is not good. People wonder how we can be Christians and still continue to use God’s name in vain. For it is written: **“The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain”** (Exod. 20:7). Are there among us those who have been guilty of stealing, lying, hatred, jealousy or bitterness? How about lust or greed? Is it not true of us, as it was of the Jews, that none of us keeps the Law? Does not God’s holy Law demand perfection in thought, word and deed? God’s Law demands that we love God above all things and that we love our neighbor as ourselves, and we have failed miserably in both of these aspects of godly living.

However, though we truly deserve God’s condemnation and punishment, GOD’S FORGIVING GRACE

AND COMPASSION will speak the last word to us. We listen in on Paul preaching the good news of Jesus in a Jewish synagogue at a place called Antioch of Pisidia. Paul has already told his listeners about the Savior's life, death and resurrection, and then he reaches the climax of his sermon with these words: **"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses."**

Here is the revelation of the mystery of God's holiness and forgiveness. Here is God's own answer to the question of how He was able to forgive the worshippers of the golden calf. It was only through this Man Jesus that there can be such a thing as divine forgiveness of sins. Moses stood between God's wrath and sinful Israel by his intercessory prayer. But if it had been only prayer, nothing more, God could not have forgiven His people. Moses went beyond prayer in his work as mediator. He came to God and said, **"Blot me out of Your book which You have written"** (Exod. 32:32). In other words, Moses offered to take the guilt and punishment of the people on himself, if as a result they might be forgiven. He was apparently on the right track of substitutionary atonement, but he wasn't the one who was able to make it happen. For Moses himself was a guilty human sinner. How could his death atone for the sins of other sinners?

Moses told the people that God would send another Mediator, like Moses and better than Moses. This other, better Mediator would be Jesus, who said to the Jews of His day: **"Moses wrote about Me."** In his role as mediator Moses was a type or picture of Jesus as the true Mediator between God and man. Moses offered to have his name blotted out of God's book in order to save his people. Jesus actually accomplished what Moses only offered. Unlike Moses, Jesus was innocent of any sin. And unlike Moses, Jesus truly had His name blotted out of God's book, so that God would forgive His people. Jesus carried sin and all its curse and punishment on the cross. Jesus was forsaken by God on the cross as the One who had committed all the sins of the entire world. As a direct result of GOD'S FORGIVING GRACE AND COMPASSION for all people, Jesus' name was blotted out of God's book as a sinner worthy of eternal hellfire.

Thus through this Man Jesus the forgiveness of sins is preached to us. Yes, God through Him does what He has always wanted to do. He forgives our sins for Jesus' sake, because Jesus already has taken the rap for us. And because He knew Jesus would certainly come and die for their sins, too, God was able to forgive the idolatrous calf-worshippers at Mt. Sinai.

Now what makes us sure that their sins and our sins really are forgiven because of Jesus Christ? It's the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That is the real proof that all our sins of lovelessness, cursing, swearing, stealing, lying, hating and coveting have already been dealt with and punished in the death of Jesus Christ. The Lord's victory over the grave is the proof that God was satisfied with the sacrifice Jesus made. Therefore through this Man is preached to us the forgiveness of our sins, and this forgiveness becomes ours, as Paul says, by believing in Him. **"By Him everyone who believes is justified,"** declared righteous in the sight of God, **"from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses."**

No, we cannot be justified from anything by the law of Moses. Since we cannot keep that law, it only accuses us of wrongdoing and will continue to accuse us as long as we live in this sinful world with our sinful flesh. Trusting in Moses, trusting in our obedience to God's Law, is a total waste of effort on our part, leading only to eternal judgment. Jesus alone is our Savior. Through Him alone our sins are forgiven. Through Him only are we justified. Through Him God exercises His forgiving grace and compassion.

We do realize that rejecters of His grace and forgiveness will not receive His forgiveness. **"He who does not believe will be condemned,"** Jesus said. For such as hate and deny the Lord "who bought them," the words of the LORD in Exodus will come true: **"visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations."** But that is not what God wants for people. **"God is love."** God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. God's name is **"merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."** Yes, this is the name of our God, who calls us to come to Jesus in faith, receive His forgiveness and truly find rest for our souls. Amen!

Exodus Sermon #16

Readings: Exodus 35:4-19 (*Offerings to be given for the Lord's tabernacle*)
Exodus 35:20-29 (*Offerings given freely by the people*)

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-12

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us – see that you abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

The pattern in the lives of the children of Israel is repeated today in the lives of all of us who are Christians. God made the Israelites His people through the blood of the Passover lambs. He defeated their enemies at the Red Sea. He set them free from their slavery. He guided and fed them in the wilderness. He gave them His Law, but they were discovered to be transgressors of His Law, deserving His rejection and punishment. Yet through the mediation of Moses God forgave them all their sins, kept them as His own and allowed them to worship Him. They then expressed their love and devotion to their forgiving God by bringing freewill offerings to the Lord for His worship, offering themselves with all their abilities and talents to erect a beautiful place of worship out in the wilderness.

Yes, this pattern is repeated in our lives, is it not? God has made us His people through the atoning blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. He has defeated our enemies by His death and resurrection in our behalf. He has guided us and fed us throughout our lives on this earth. But His Law always reveals us to be lawbreakers, sinners worthy of eternal damnation. Yet God in His grace continually forgives our sins for Jesus' sake and continues to accept us as His people. So what can we do, but love Him, praise Him, serve Him and bring to Him our FREEWILL OFFERINGS – our own selves to do His bidding, our talents and abilities to carry out His work, our money treasures which God has given us – all to use in the spreading of His Word and the serving of His will.

What a wonderful thing it was when the forgiven children of Israel brought their freewill offerings for the construction of God's tabernacle! The book of Exodus says: **“Everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the LORD's offering.”** Again it says: **“They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, and brought their”** various articles of jewelry for the Lord's worship. **“All the women who were gifted artisans spun yarn with their hands”** for the Lord's tabernacle. **“The children of Israel brought a free-will offering to the LORD, all the men and women whose hearts were willing.”**

Surely our God still wants our freewill offerings today for the various projects and building programs that are necessary for the preaching and teaching of His Word. Our congregation has recently decided to add another wing to our church and school, and so there will be ample opportunity in the next few months for us all – men, women and children – to bring our freewill offerings to the Lord in the form of money, talents, time, special efforts and prayers. God wants our hearts to be stirred with a sense of His blessings to us, so that we shall want to participate in this building project, as the Lord gives us the strength and ability to do so.

The Lord's way of doing His work, even in the Old Testament, was through FREEWILL OFFERINGS. Certainly that is also the case in the New Testament, as our text from 2 Corinthians proves. The apostle Paul here was writing to the Corinthians in southern Greece, stirring them up to participate in the special offering he was gathering for the poverty-stricken Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. For the encouragement of the Christians in southern Greece, he presented to them the good example of the Macedonians in northern Greece, in places like Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea. He said: **“Brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed**

on the churches of Macedonia, that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”

The Macedonians were very poor. They might have excused themselves from this offering for other poor people by saying that they were too poor to cooperate in this effort. But their joy in the Lord Jesus did not permit them to excuse themselves. They wanted to be included. Paul did not beg for gifts from them; they begged for the opportunity to share in the offering. They implored Paul to receive their gift for their fellow Christians. The reason for this was, as Paul says, that they first gave themselves to the Lord.

Surely our Lord wants us before He wants our money or our talents. As our Lord Jesus gave Himself for us to take away our sins, so He wants us to give ourselves to Him for His work. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”** Jesus has bought us with the price of His blood. We belong to Him. Should we not then give ourselves to Him for whatever function He directs us? Of course, we do not all have the same gifts or abilities or bank accounts. But whoever we are, God can use us for some purpose in His work. The main thing is that we first give ourselves to Him, and then after that we give ourselves to our fellow Christians to participate in the work of the whole group.

The Christians in Corinth needed encouragement. So Paul sent his assistant Titus to them. **“We urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.”** The Corinthians had made a good beginning in their offerings under Titus’ direction, but now things were bogging down. Paul by letter and Titus in person needed to encourage them to complete what they had begun. **“It is to your advantage,”** Paul wrote, **“not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you must also complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.”**

Obviously, our Lord wants only willing gifts. He wants us to want to give and share and serve out of the willing desire of our hearts. Now what if the desire is there, but we don’t have the money or we don’t have the skills which are needed? God does not expect us to give what He has not first given to us. Our gift is accepted by Him according to what we have, and of course, He knows what we have and what we don’t have.

Unfortunately, our flesh sometimes succeeds in persuading us to think that we don’t have what we really do have. At such times we could contribute more than we think we can. The Corinthians seemed to have the desire to help out, but they could not get the collection of their offering completed. They were slow in translating their declared willingness into tangible results. Paul and Titus therefore found it necessary to encourage them to move ahead and finish what they had started.

In our current building program the church council has decided to send out teams of visitors to meet in person with the households of our congregation. They go for the purposes of providing information about our building project, answering questions the members may have and encouraging support in whatever way support is possible for the individual or household that they visit. Because of our sinful flesh, which is naturally lazy and disinterested in the things of God, encouragement is necessary among us, even as it was necessary for the congregation in Corinth.

However, do not think that anyone in our congregation will issue any commands or orders to anyone else as to how much anyone should give or how many hours he should devote to this building project or any other task in our church. The apostle Paul, spokesman for God Himself, said: **“I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love.”** Our church will not issue any orders or give any commands concerning gifts or contributions or volunteer labors. God and His apostles do not do that. But it is true, as Paul said, that cooperation in doing the Lord’s work is a way of proving the sincerity of our love for the Lord and His church. Talk is easy, but man-hours of labor, attendance at long meetings, borrowing money to give it to the congregation, or digging down deep and coming up with a 100 dollars or 500 dollars or 1,000 dollars for the Building Fund – that is much more difficult, and something the flesh keeps resisting every step of the way.

So we ask ourselves: Is my love for the Lord sincere? Do we really want His work to make progress in our midst? Do we want His school and His church to grow? Do we want His Gospel to reach the ears of those who do not now hear it? Do we love our Lord?

Surely we ought to love Him. How can we help but love Him? Look at what He has done! **“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”** You think that you are making yourself poor for Jesus’ sake? Take stock of what He did for you. He was God. He was endlessly rich in glory and majesty. Yet He came down to sinful earth, became one of us and lived here on earth as a very poor man for our sakes. Yes, He suffered and died for us the death we deserve because of our sins. He proved the sincerity of His love for each one of us. He became as a poor sinner in our place and died every sinner’s death, so that we might become rich in the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance of eternal life.

May God, through the Holy Spirit and the heart-changing power of His grace, produce in us the fruit of love for Jesus, so that we will gladly bring our freewill offerings to Him and thus prove the sincerity of our love for Him, even as He has so richly loved us. Amen!

Exodus Sermon #17

Readings: Exodus 35:30-36:7 (*The people gave more than what was needed*)

Exodus 39:42-43; 40:34-38 (*The glory of the Lord entered the finished tabernacle*)

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 9:2-8

For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

When the Lord God commanded the Israelites at Mt. Sinai to build a tabernacle for His worship, there were many opportunities for the Israelites to give their treasures and their talents for the Lord’s work. The book of Exodus says that those who had gold or silver brought it. Those who had the needed animal skins brought them. Those who had the desired wood brought it. Those who were skilled in spinning yarn used their skills to provide what was needed for the Lord’s tabernacle. In particular, two men were skilled in artistic design, Bezaleel and Aholiab, and they were put in charge of the whole project, for the Lord God specifically called and equipped them to do this work.

Did the project succeed? Most certainly it did. Many people came and did the necessary work. The people brought their freewill offerings daily. In fact, there were so many offerings that the craftsmen said to Moses, **“The people bring much more than enough.”** They had to be told to stop their contributions. Finally, when the work was completed, the Lord showed His satisfaction by entering the tabernacle in a cloud of glory, and with this event the history recorded in the book of Exodus came to an end.

In our congregation and church body we have not reached the point where we must ask our members to refrain from giving because there is more than enough. Far from it! Every Sunday our bulletin gives a progress report on our monetary contributions, and surely one can notice by now that we are over \$4,000 behind in the category of our “current needs.” Although our giving for CLC Missions is closer to our goal, there does not seem to be any way we could possibly give **“more than enough”** for this cause, as well as for the other causes routinely mentioned in our bulletin: our local Building Fund, the ILC Improvement Fund, the CLC Mission Development Fund and so forth. It seems that these funds are always in need of more donations, and I’m confident the reason for this is not that our boards and committees are spending the money recklessly or foolishly. In addition to the need for money, our church is always looking for volunteers to help with many different projects, and it is very rare when we can say, “Now we have enough help” or even say, “We have more

than enough.”

Because of this constant need for more help and more funds, we may be tempted to consider different methods of fund-raising and eliciting volunteers. We notice how the world is able to raise money for its causes, and thus we are tempted to imitate some of these ways and try various high-pressure techniques, arm-twisting, forms of bribery, perhaps even threats of one kind or another. We are aware that some congregations and church bodies have resorted to hiring professional fund-raisers, whose methods often appear to be successful in the sense that the money seems to roll in.

Of course, we need to be very careful in these matters. For our Lord, you see, is not as much interested in the size of our gifts as He is in our motivation for giving. If our members increase their giving to the point that all our programs are well-funded and yet these gifts are given for the wrong reason and with the wrong motivation, then we are not pleasing the Lord at all. Cain’s offering may have been equal to Abel’s offering in monetary value, and yet it was not acceptable, because Cain did not give his offering in faith. During the last week of His life on earth Jesus watched the people bring their offerings for the temple. He was not impressed with the left-over giving of the wealthy, but with the two coins, almost worthless in monetary value, contributed by the poor widow. The point of the matter is this: our Lord wants our giving to be done in cheerfulness and faith. Whatever gifts are not brought in this spirit are not acceptable to our Father in heaven. Therefore on the basis of our text let us consider and apply this important matter today: **GIVING TO THE LORD IN CHEERFULNESS AND FAITH.**

The Corinthian Christians had begun a collection for the poor Christians living in Jerusalem. They had begun this offering with great zeal and enthusiasm. So much so, that the apostle Paul boasted of their zeal to the believers in Macedonia. **“I know your willingness,”** he said, **“about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia [where Corinth was] was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.”**

Now after this initial enthusiasm the congregation’s effort had subsided, and Paul was concerned that his boasting about them might prove to be in vain. He was also concerned that both he and they might be ashamed of their actual offering in comparison with his boast. For this reason he was sending some men to encourage them to complete what they had started. **“I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your bountiful gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”**

You see, Paul did not want their gifts to come from them **“as a grudging obligation.”** He wanted them to want to give their gifts; he did not want them to feel that they had to give these gifts because they had previously promised them. God is not happy with gifts grudgingly given. Thus Paul said to them and to us: **“Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

If the church uses methods that get people to give, but their contributions are given grudgingly, nothing spiritual is gained. And if people give because they feel they have to give, or because someone is pressuring them to give, nothing spiritual is gained. God loves a cheerful giver. The only “pressure” that God wants to be moving us is the pressure of a heart that wants to give because of all the gifts that God has given to us. God Himself is a cheerful Giver of so many blessings to all of us, and His gifts given freely and cheerfully to you and me are what will motivate us to give freely and cheerfully in return.

Let’s consider what has He given us. It is written in the epistle of James: **“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”** What can we identify as God’s gift given cheerfully to you and me? His “word of truth,” of course, which is His word concerning Jesus Christ. In the Gospel we learn of our Savior, who gave Himself into death for us to atone for our sins, which include our sins of selfishness and greed. What else can make us truly cheerful? What else other than this word from Jesus: **“Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven.”** By this word of forgiveness He has made us Christians. By this word of forgiveness He sustains us in our daily lives and makes us the rich heirs of eternal life.

Has someone ever said “Good morning” to you and you responded, “What’s good about it?” Let me tell you what’s good about it. God has given you life, breath and all things for body and soul. He has given you your

Savior and His Word of forgiveness. He has given you the Holy Spirit to live and work in your hearts. And He has given you blessing after blessing after blessing: food, clothing, shoes, house, home and all the rest. And you have the spiritual blessings of the pure Word, educational facilities for your family and yourself, ministers of the Word who are willing to help you, a Father in heaven who loves you perfectly, and a congregation of Christians who want to love you too.

In addition, if we start thinking of our congregational blessings, the list goes on and on. Think of our congregational history. Think of what God has given us. Think of what God is giving us right now: the mission opportunities and other blessings that we have. It's enough to make us so cheerful that our hearts are ready to explode from the cheerfulness. Besides all the spiritual blessings of the Word, a charter member remembers us in her will with a gift of over \$100,000, and suddenly we own a teacherage and we're ready to start a building project. I've never experienced anything like this before. In the last year I've had more opportunities than ever before in my ministry to share the Gospel with persons who are non-members. I certainly have something to be cheerful about. I hope it becomes evident, at least once in a while, that I am cheerful because of these blessings and opportunities from God. For this is why I'm here on earth, and this is why you're here also, to rejoice in Jesus' forgiveness and eternal salvation and spread the Word to others in every possible way. God loves your cheerful gifts for this cause, even as He loves you, the cheerful giver.

So why do we hold back? Why do the gifts not come in such overflowing amounts that we finally have to tell people, "You are bringing too much?" I think the reason we hold back is a certain prevalent fear. We are afraid to give too much, because then we won't have what we think is enough for our own needs and pleasures. We give as little as we do, because we don't believe as strongly as we should that God will bless our giving and will supply all of our needs abundantly. No, I don't claim that the blessings will be automatic. I'm not saying that if you put \$10 into the offering plate, you will get back \$20, or that if you put in \$100, you'll get back \$200. God has other ways, even better ways of blessing us, besides giving us cash.

Yet this much we know, for it is written in our text: **"He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."** Our God wants us to cling firmly to this promise and give our gifts accordingly. God wants us to give with confident trust in Him, for His apostle says: **"God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work."** Our God is able to bless us beyond what we imagine. Let us trust that He will bless us as promised and so give our gifts with that kind of faith. Amen!

An Exegesis of Psalm 22:1-18:

The Cost behind the 23rd Psalm

Paul Tiefel, Jr.

* The conclusion of this sermon study, originally done to be a midweek Lenten series, covers the four remaining texts chosen from Psalm 22:1-18. The first two sermon texts were treated in the previous installment (cf. *Journal of Theology*, 46:2, pp. 18-28).

The overall theme for the series and a descriptive outline of the texts are listed below. Each Lenten text from Psalm 22 has a corresponding verse from Psalm 23, which is printed in italics at the beginning of each sermon study.

Looking Forward to the Shepherd's Suffering

1. He suffers the agonies of hell, forsaken by God (vv. 1-5).
2. He suffers verbal abuse (vv. 6-10).
3. He suffers alone, surrounded by pressures (vv. 11-13).
4. He suffers great physical pain (vv. 14-15b).
5. He suffers death (vv. 15c-17).
6. He suffers the loss of all material goods (v. 18).

May the Spirit bless both our study and preaching of His Word.

Sermon text #3

Psalm 22:11-13: Jesus suffers alone, surrounded by pressures

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over” (Ps. 23:5).

12 אֶל־תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־צָרָה קְרוּבָה כִּי־אֵין עֹזֶר:

13 סָבְבוּנִי פָּרִים רַבִּים אֲבִירֵי בָשָׁן כְּתֵרוּנִי:

14 פָּצוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם אֲרִיֵה טָרַף וְשֹׁאֵן:

Notes on Psalm 22 texts: In all the notes given for selected Hebrew words, material in quotation marks comes from the Gesenius-Tregelles *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*. The verse number listed first (preceded by v.) corresponds to the verse number of the English text, and the verse number in parentheses indicates the verse of the Hebrew text.

- v. 11 (12) אֶל־תִּרְחַק Negative command of immediate application – note the progression of thought: in verse 1 God is far away, leading to the command in vv. 11 and 19, *Stop being far away*.
- צָרָה This noun, translated *distress*, is related to the verbal root צָרַר which means “to press, to compress,” suggesting to us the connotation of pressure.
- עֹזֶר Qal Act. Ptc. of עָזַר “helper, used of an ally in war”
- v. 12 (13) בָּשָׁן “*Bashan*, northern part of the region beyond Jordan; bounded on the north by the mountains of Hermon”; land of King Og and the Amorites; known for oaks, rich pastures, and abundant cattle; here the Hebrew words אֲבִירֵי בָשָׁן might be similar to our Texas Longhorns.
- v. 13 (14) פָּצוּ Qal Perf. of פָּצָה “to tear in pieces ... hence *to distend, to open*, as in threatening (like beasts of prey), followed by עַל”

Translation of verses 11-13:

11. Be not far away from Me, for distress is near.
For there is no helper.
12. Many bulls have encircled Me.
Strong ones of Bashan have surrounded Me.
13. They have gnashed at Me with their mouth.
A mauling and screaming lion.

Bible References

- Matt. 26:56b Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.
- 1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

How shall we list the many enemies who encircled Jesus and gnashed at Him with their mouths? From His followers (Judas with a kiss of betrayal and Peter with an oath of denial) to the obvious opponents (the plotting scribes and Pharisees); from the Jewish religious leaders (high priests Caiaphas and Annas and the Sanhedrin) to the Roman authorities (Governor Pilate and King Herod); from the judgment hall (the false witnesses and the “crucify Him” crowd) to the death scene at the cross (the onlookers, the soldiers, even the fellow death-mates) – truly there were many.

Sermon Thoughts:

Jesus was certainly surrounded – by religious and political leaders, by “friends” and foes, by Jew and Gentile, by evil humans and evil angels. And He was ALONE.

In the second half of Psalm 22:13 the reference to a lion has unmistakable implications of the old evil foe, the devil.

The words “strong ones of Bashan” refer to a well-known strain of strong bulls living in that area, and like our expression “workhorse,” this description can also be used in reference to a human. However, unlike our English figures (cf. “strong as an ox,” “thoroughbred” and so forth) we should not think favorably of what is described in this Hebrew word picture. The features of this parallel (cf. also the “dogs” of v. 16) are the animal-like qualities of Christ’s enemies. They do not act like human beings toward Jesus.

The “pressure” on Good Friday was immense – no sleep for a day and a half, great physical pain, intense spiritual suffering, inhumane treatment by friend and foe, harassment from man and the devil, the agonies of hell, the future of the human race solely in His hands, the loneliness. There would be no help from any human source.

Ponder the great wonder of seeing the Son of God in such a pathetic state—and to think that He volunteered to be in such humiliation—for me, for you! Marvel also at His holy and perfect trust: He went through hell on the cross and still cried “My God.” Yet this perfect and vicarious suffering by the Shepherd now makes it so that God is always with us and pours out overflowing blessings upon our heads, even in the presence of our enemies.

Theme: *The High Cost of Security for my Soul*

1. Jesus was suffering all alone that I might never be alone.
2. Jesus was surrounded by every type of foe to give me victory over every enemy.

Hymns (TLH): 172:1-4, 457, 153 (esp. v. 2), 151 (esp. v. 3)

Responsive Psalm: 56

Sermon text #4

Psalm 22:14-15b: Jesus suffers great physical pain

“He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters” (Ps. 23:2).

15 כַּמּוֹם נִשְׁפַּכְתִּי וְהִתְפָּרְדוּ כָּל-עַצְמוֹתַי הִיָּה לִבִּי כִּדְוֹנָה נִמְס בְּחוֹךְ מַעֵי:

16 יָבֵשׁ כַּחֲרֹשׁ כַּחֲי וּלְשׁוֹנֵי מִדְּבַק מִלְּקוֹחֵי

v. 14 (15) וְהִתְפָּרְדוּ Hithpael Perf. of פָּרַד “to separate oneself, to be put asunder” – this word does not have the idea of broken bones, as in Psalm 51:8 (“...bones You have broken”). We note the unity of Scripture on this point. The thought is either *My bones all stick out*, which corresponds with the ‘counting’ of v. 17. Or it means *My bones are out of joint*. I prefer the former way of rendering and understand it to be a reference to the process of crucifixion.

מַעֵי only in pl. *inward parts, bowels*; we would probably say “pit of the stomach” and use “sink” to render the Niphel verb נִמַּס (מִסָּה), which means to *melt*.

v. 15 (16) חֲרֹשׁ “a potsherd,” piece of pottery; expressing the idea of something very dry

Translation of verses 14-15b:

15. Like waters I am poured out, and all My bones are sticking out.
My heart is like wax; it is melted into the pit of My stomach.
16. My strength has dried up as a potsherd.
My tongue is glued to My jaws.

Bible References

Later on the cross – John 19:28-29

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I thirst!” Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.

Earlier on the cross – Mark 15:23

Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.

Psalm 34:20 He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.

John 19:32-36 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “Not one of His bones shall be broken.”

Sermon Thoughts

“Emotionally and physically drained” – that is the thought of the first half of verse 14.

Such physical sufferings! In explaining a similar description of the crucified Messiah in Psalm 22:6, Keil-Delitzsch translates Isaiah 52:14 and uses it as a parallel: “So marred was His appearance, that He no longer looked like a man.”

How many of us have experienced the swollen tongue that comes with parched thirst? Yet we must be careful with the vivid description of Christ’s physical sufferings, so that we do not overlook or de-emphasize the intense spiritual sufferings. Still, the physical pain was very real and part of His “bitter sufferings and death.”

Jesus has sanctified, so to speak, the bed of pain that we now sometimes have. He has been through it. In addition, He has changed it from a bed of punishment to a bed of chastisement, from torture for sin to a development of faith.

By enduring such physical pain, Jesus has rescued us from the eternal pain of hell (recall the thirst of the rich man in hell – Luke 16:24). He has purchased the blessings of spiritual food (“green pastures”) and drink (“quiet waters”) for my soul.

Theme: *How do you spell relief from physical pain?*

1. Jesus, who has been there
2. Jesus, who has guaranteed that such pain will end
3. Jesus, who counters physical pain with spiritual blessings

Hymns (TLH): 171, 175, 154, 151:6

Responsive Psalm: 42

Sermon text #5

Psalm 22:15c-17: Jesus suffers death

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4).

16 וְלַעֲפַר־מוֹת תִּשְׁפֹּתֵנִי:

17 כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֶדְתַּת מְרָעִים הִקִּיפוּנִי כְּאֲרֵי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי:

18 אֲסַפֵּר כָּל־עֲצָמוֹתַי הִמָּה וַיִּשָּׂו יְרֵאוּבֵי:

v. 16 (17) כְּאֲרֵי

There is considerable debate over the root of this word. One may look at the commentaries for the discussion. I simply choose to take the word as “pierce.”

We also encounter a third word meaning *surround*:

הִקִּיפוּנִי in v. 16: Hiph. of נָקַפּ cut, strike → *go in a circle*

forms of סבב in vv. 16 and 12: turn oneself → *encompass*

כְּתָרוּנִי in v. 12: *surround*

v. 17 (18) יִבִּטּוּ

Hiph. Imperf. – נבט *look, behold*; cf. Num. 21:9 – look on serpent of brass; but cf. also Gen. 19:26 – Lot’s wife looking back.

Translation of verses 15c-17:

15c. You place Me in the dust of death.

16. For dogs have encircled Me.

A crowd of evildoers have encompassed Me – piercers of My hands and My feet.

17. I number all My bones.

They look, they stare at Me.

Bible References

John 19:11a Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.”

John 10:18 “No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

Luke 23:33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

Matt. 26:47 And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Easter evening – John 20:20

When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

One week later – John 20:27

Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

Phil. 3:7-10 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.

Sermon Thoughts

The verses of our fifth text reflect some of the public humiliation involved in going through death by crucifixion (cf. the onlookers and those who were staring in v. 17c). There is that morbid curiosity which leads humans to rush to see an accident or to delight in the graphic Hollywood portrayal of human suffering.

We again have a hint of the inhumane treatment of the Savior with the term *dogs*. Perhaps *pit bulls* would do as a vivid modern translation.

Note the doctrinal significance of verse 15c. Yes, Jesus was crucified by human hands, and yet it was all by the design and purpose of God Himself.

The Savior’s humiliation, even to the point of death on a cross, has changed our own death into a mere shadow. God’s acceptance of this Sacrifice means that I will always have His presence and help, even in the hour of my physical death. No evil can come to me, for God is with me because of Jesus.

Theme: *Changing death valley into a mere shadow*

1. God’s removal of the sting of death by the death of His Son

2. God’s determination to provide gentle, abiding care even through the death of us

Hymns: 371 (esp. v. 6), 513, 600, 142 (esp. v. 3)

Responsive Psalm: 90

Sermon text #6

Psalm 22:18: Jesus suffers the loss of all material goods

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1)

19 יַחֲלֶקְנוּ בְּגָדֵי לָהֶם וְעַל־לְבוּשֵׁי יַפְיֵלוּ גֹרֶל:

v. 18 (19)	יַחֲלֶקְנוּ	Piel Imperf. of חָלַק “to divide, e.g. booty; to apportion, to allot”; but not the sense of divide by cutting or tearing
	בְּגָדֵי	masc. pl. <i>clothes</i> (usual word)
	לְבוּשֵׁי	masc. sing. esp. “a splendid garment”
	גֹרֶל	masc. sing. a stone or pebble used as a lot, equivalent to the way people use dice today.

Translation of verse 18:

They distribute My clothes among themselves.

For My robe they cast a die.

Bible References

John 19:23-24 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,” that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: “They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.” Therefore the soldiers did these things.

Luke 9:58 And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

2 Cor. 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

1 Tim. 6:6-8 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

See also Phil. 3:7-10.

Sermon Thoughts

At the cross Jesus suffered the loss of all material goods – not that He had that much in the first place. We know that He did not own a house and seemed to depend on friends, especially the women folk, for food and other necessities. The articles of clothing divided by the soldiers appear to be the only material possessions that the Savior owned.

What a sharp contrast we have portrayed here! While the Savior is dying for sinners, the sinners nearest to the cross ignore Him and plunder Him. Luther referred to the episode of casting lots as rude horseplay. Leupold says that the soldiers “wanted to dramatize their conviction that this pretender’s ambitions were at an end.”

It is awesome to see the precision of this prophecy expressed at the time of King David and its corresponding fulfillment take place some 1000 years later!

What single sentence in Scripture (Ps. 23:1) could mean more? What treasure could be any greater than to be able to say, “The LORD is my Shepherd?” And even more so, when one understands the price Jesus paid to become the Good Shepherd of His sheep. Verse one of Psalm 23 is truly the culmination of the suffering predicted (verses 1-18) and the victory promised (verses 19-31) of Psalm 22.

Theme: *The willingness of Jesus to give up everything*

1. That righteousness of His replaces my sinful greed.
2. That sacrifice of Him fills my every need.

Hymns: 423 (esp. vv. 1-4), 442, 403, 405

A Red Herring in the WELS Fellowship Doctrine

Bertram J. Naumann¹

When a herring is dried and smoked, the curing process turns the fish red and makes it highly aromatic. In days gone by, one redeeming use of the cured herring was to drag it across the path of hounds chasing down the scent of an otherwise doomed fox. In turn, the aristocratic men and ladies astride their steeds were likewise turned from their purpose of running an eventually exhausted fox to ground. And so the fox was saved for another future outing. Without carrying the similarities too far, it appears to this writer that by the historic introduction of the words “persistent errorist” as necessary to identify a false teacher properly, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has allowed a “red herring” to lead them, wittingly or unwittingly, away from the action Scripture calls for in our dealing with false teachers, as revealed in Titus 3:10-11, Romans 16:17-18 and other passages.

The introduction of the word “persistent” by the WELS into the fellowship doctrine, and specifically into the question of when to apply the command of separation, is a fact pointed out not only in the writings of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), but is also freely and frequently declared in the statements and publications of the WELS.

Throughout the controversy leading to the split and the formation of the CLC, there were, to be sure, numerous references made by some of the CLC’s founding fathers to “persistent” errorists, apparently done on their part with tacit approval to the use of this term. However, it is a primary purpose of this article at least to indicate the dangerous and unscriptural directions which more recent and current usages of the term in the WELS have been leading. We contend furthermore, and it has been so stated in CLC writings, that were the now sainted fathers aware of how far afield the word “persistent” would be applied in the future to delay taking the action which Scripture requires, they would most certainly have disavowed its continued use. We also contend that the CLC and WELS positions regarding the need to determine “persistent errorists” are really quite different.² As a brief assessment of the CLC position, we quote Pastor Daniel Fleischer in his unpublished essay “There Still is a Difference”:

The CLC is consistent in its position, which contends that identified and acknowledged false teachers and church bodies are to be avoided without any attempt to determine persistence.³

Mark Braun, a WELS associate professor of theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College, wrote the following in his article, “A Tale of Two Synods: Lessons from the Dissolution of the Synodical Conference”:

The traditional understanding and usage of the passage [Romans 16:17-18], at least since the beginning of the century in both synods [WELS and LCMS], was that it prohibited any expression of church fellowship unless based on complete agreement in doctrine. *The doctrine* referred to all of Scripture’s teaching; distinctions between fundamental and nonfundamental doctrines were invalid. The verb form used for those *who cause divisions and offenses* suggested a repeated, habitual practice, rather than an occasional mistake in word or action.... The passage warned against those whose repeated action caused divisions and placed obstacles in the path of believers. These divisions and offences were *contrary to the doctrine* – hence, the uniquely WELS term “persistent errorist” (*CHARIS*, March 2001, 1:1, pp. 34-35).⁴

We should note especially what is said in the last sentence. The term “persistent errorist” is identified as “uniquely WELS.”

The CLC has stated repeatedly and emphasized, in word as well as action, that an errorist is to be identified by the acknowledged fact of his false teaching. To determine that the false teaching in question is not merely a slip of the tongue, an unintentional mistake, but an established fact, the word “persistent” may have a limited place, albeit far less than usage in the WELS seems to be leading that church body. Therefore, to avoid opening up the Pandora’s Box of false practice into which the WELS has become embroiled, we believe it is better not to use the words “persistent” or “persistent errorist” as a necessary component in identifying a false teacher.

The “persistent errorist” principle in recent WELS statements

To provide an example of such false practice occurring within the WELS today, we turn to the choir

policy of Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC) and cite a few paragraphs from “A Statement Regarding Non-WELS Students in the College’s Choirs.” It too is written by Dr. Mark Braun, edited by Dr. John E. Bauer and begins with an explanatory preface: “In response to inquiries regarding the WLC’s practice of including non-WELS students in its choirs, this statement was written in December 2002 to provide a rationale for the College’s practice within the context of the WELS’ doctrinal position on church fellowship.”⁵

If a student does not know the teachings of our church body, we believe our mission as a college and as a church body is to unfold the Scriptures to them, in the classroom and in other settings, and to involve them in appropriate spiritual elements of our campus life. Assuming that such a student is a weak fellow Christian and not a persistent errorist, we follow the practical implications expressed in the essay on fellowship: “Weakness of faith is *not in itself a reason for terminating church fellowship*, but rather an *encouragement for practicing church fellowship more vigorously* to help one another overcome our weakness of faith. *In precept and example Scripture abounds with exhortations to pay our full debt of love toward the weak*” (*Doctrinal Statements*, p. 33, emphasis ours).

It is not always easy to determine whether a person is a weak fellow Christian or a persistent errorist. We face the same challenge that our congregations and our area Lutheran high schools face when we meet and seek to serve those who do not belong to the WELS. It would be uncharitable for us to assume that all members of other church bodies are persistent errorists, particularly when their actions reveal that they are willing, even eager, to learn more about what we believe. Evangelical practice requires us to recognize other factors besides the denominational membership of such people.

It is our belief that the College has an obligation, in a pastoral and evangelical way, to determine as best we can whether a non-WELS student acts out of weakness of faith or in persistent error. Evangelical practice means we examine each situation individually. We do not accept what may be considered a “one size fits all” approach in which a category of students is treated in the same way one might treat a visitor to a congregation. Such an approach runs the risk of mechanical and legalistic application. Mission prospects and non-WELS students do not come with the same level of understanding.

We believe our practice of including non-WELS students in our choirs is consistent with our synod’s *Doctrinal Statements* so long as these students do not act in persistent error.

While the directive of Romans 16:17-18 is addressed to “brethren,” the passages are not limited to such and give clear instructions for what is to be done when error has infected a person or a church body. Yet with one grand sweep the aforementioned policy of Wisconsin Lutheran College circumvents the same passages in dealing with potential students outside of the WELS fellowship; this is done with the rationale that since all Christians are invisibly united in the One True Church, the *Una Sancta*, they need to determine, as best they are able, “whether a non-WELS student acts out of weakness of faith or in persistent error.” So the question must arise:

Are we then to fellowship freely with all whom we somehow perceive to be merely weak in faith, as long as they do not act in “persistent error?”

Our own confessional document “Concerning Church Fellowship” provides, we believe, an answer that is fully in accord with Scripture. Under the section “Argument from Matthew 18” we point to paragraphs 70 and 71:

We are also told that, in keeping with Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 18:15-17 for making every effort to regain the man who has trespassed against us, patience should be exercised toward the erring teachers. It should be clear that to avoid a false teacher and to look upon a man as a heathen and a publican are two entirely different things. The former is based on the danger inherent in the goods which are being peddled as truth. The latter is based on the evidence of an unrepentant heart. The false teacher may indeed, in individual cases, eventually prove himself to be an unrepentant sinner, one who is willfully blaspheming God’s Word against his better knowledge. In that case we would have to consider him as a heathen man and a publican. But to contend that until this is true he is to be allowed to have the status of a teacher in good standing in the Church, this is utterly preposterous. He is to be avoided because he is dangerous (Rom. 16:18). He is dangerous whether or not there is hope that he may still repent.

Here we must be careful in our use of the word “persistent” in describing a false teacher. This word came into use in the Church as an antonym of “inadvertent.” In this connection it has its place, as we have shown above, namely, that the Christian exercise great care before charging a person or groups with heresy, first determining charitably whether it was done unwittingly and inadvertently, or whether the

speaker sticks to his error, which is persistence. To say that we must be positive that the errorist intends stubbornly to pursue his course despite all admonition requires an omniscience not granted to mortals. Yet it is mortals who are asked to withdraw from such as teach falsely.

Sooner or later, one who inquires into the questions in which this paper delves will want to examine the Greek verb σκοπεῖν (skopein), which expresses the meaning “to watch out for,” as a sentinel on lookout would do. Its usage in Romans 16:17 has been translated in the KJV as “mark” and in the NKJV as “note.” In regard to the meaning of σκοπεῖν, Prof. Emeritus Clifford Kuehne commented with unique clarity of style on a WELS-CLC article in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (WLQ):

One of the CLC representatives at the 1987-1990 meetings used the following illustration in an attempt to show the representatives of the WELS and ELS how we understood the skopein (linear present infinitive) and ekklinate (aorist imperative): “Each Christmas my wife and I go to Florida to visit our oldest son, who lives there in a mobile home. My wife enjoys doing some housecleaning while we are there and I can almost hear my son saying to his mother as he leaves for work the first day of our visit, ‘Keep your eyes open for cockroaches, and squish them.’ My wife’s continual watching out for the cockroaches would be comparable to the skopein, and the peremptory ‘squish them’ would be comparable to the ekklinate.”

In the WELS exegesis of Romans 16:17-18 at the time of the meetings, their essayist in effect carried the process of admonition into Romans 16:17-18 on the back of skopein from other passages – passages which contain this verb, but which do not deal with false teachers. (He found what he called a “positive slant” in these passages.) This is obviously an exegetical fallacy, namely, to import the content of one passage into another passage which treats of a different topic, justifying this procedure because both of the passages happen to use the same word.⁶

In a paper presented to the WELS Association of Lutheran Educators in 2002 and also contained in a subsequent *CHARIS* article in 2003, the following statements by Dr. Braun should further indicate the extent to which the WELS has gone in contrasting weak brothers and persistent errorists, and in the process doing the very thing against which Prof. Kuehne warned – carrying the process of admonition into Romans 16:17-18.

In the 1950s, when the Wisconsin Synod in its great debate with the Missouri Synod was compelled to reexamine and delineate its fellowship principles more precisely, our synodical fathers wisely recognized the distinction between those who are weak in their understanding of Scripture and willing to receive further instruction, and those who refuse to accept further testimony but cling to unbiblical beliefs and practices. The uniquely WELS nomenclature of *weak brother* and *persistent errorist*, though unfamiliar to most other Christians, accurately reflects Romans 16:17-18. God calls us to separate from those who *habitually* cause divisions and place obstacles in our way that are contrary to the teaching we have learned.

Significantly, the “Essay on Church Fellowship” in the *WELS Doctrinal Statements* of 1970 never mentions one’s denominational membership as the only or even the primary criterion for determining whether someone is a weak Christian or a persistent errorist.... Instead it says, “We can no longer recognize and treat as Christian brethren those who *in spite of patient admonition persistently adhere to an error in doctrine or practice, demand recognition for their error, and make propaganda for it.*”⁷

Aren’t the floodgates of selective fellowship, if not blatant religious unionism, being opened wide here? That appears to be the case, as Dr. Braun continues in the same article, speaking from the perspective of what takes place primarily at Wisconsin Lutheran College:

It is not always easy to determine whether a student is a weak Christian or a persistent errorist. Wouldn’t it be uncharitable of us automatically to assume that all members of other church bodies are persistent errorists—particularly when their actions reveal they are willing, even eager, to learn more about what we believe? Evangelical practice requires us to consider other factors besides the denominational membership of such people. Assuming that such students are weak Christians, not persistent errorists, we follow the practical implications expressed in the Essay on Fellowship: “Weakness in faith is *not in itself a reason for terminating church fellowship*, but rather *an encouragement for practicing church fellowship more vigorously* to help one another overcome our weakness of faith” (*CHARIS*, 3:1, p. 28, emphasis added by Braun).

Our intent so far has concentrated on reasons why the word “persistent” should be abandoned in setting forth the principles of fellowship and separation. In the quotation and example above we not only see evidence

of how the WELS has formally adopted this word in its doctrinal statements; we also see the delaying effect which application of the “persistent errorist” principle will invariably lead. Focusing attention once again on the same doctrinal thesis below, we note that in defining and determining “persistently,” a number of criteria have to be met before the command to avoid is applied. Prepared by the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and included in the 1997 issuance of the *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS*, the “Theses on Church Fellowship” openly states (with boldface emphasis added by the *Journal*):

We can no longer recognize and treat as Christian brethren **those who in spite of patient admonition persistently adhere to an error in doctrine or practice, demand recognition for their error, and make propaganda for it.**

In a paper presented to the CLC’s Great Lakes Pastoral Conference in September of 2003, Prof. David Lau, who taught at Immanuel Lutheran Seminary at the time, correctly noted the extra-biblical elements found in this statement:

Notice...the “and” in the WELS statement. It is not enough for the errorist to adhere to an error in doctrine or practice. He must also demand recognition for it and make propaganda for it before fellowship should be terminated. All these additions make it necessary for the group doing the suspending to do more than look at the facts of what is being done and compare them with Scripture. No, the group must also determine whether the errorist is persistent, whether the admonition has been patient enough, and also whether the errorist is demanding recognition for the error (whatever that means) and making propaganda for it. Again, using this criterion will lead to debates as to whether propaganda is being made or not. The CLC confession sticks with the Scriptural criterion and the Scriptural criterion alone: Are the persons in question causing divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptural doctrine?⁸

Application of the “persistent errorist” principle, and its inevitable delay of following the command to separate, apparently has carried over into counsel given to members of other churches who have concerns about the false teaching in those churches and come to WELS churches as inquiring visitors. In the quotation below John F. Brug, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, expresses as a WELS position what we believe to be, at least in practice, a real and current difference between the WELS and the CLC. In speaking of exceptions to the fellowship principles of Scripture, he states:

When members of another Lutheran synod which is not in fellowship with us are visiting services in a WELS church because they are disturbed by the liberalism in their church and they are considering becoming members of the WELS for confessional reasons, we will encourage them to regard themselves as communicant members of their present church until they have given their testimony against the false teaching of that church, their testimony has been rejected, and they are, therefore, compelled to leave that church.⁹

In other words, the WELS pastor who gives such counsel would be sending the concerned visitor back to the influence of the false teacher – the same false teacher who poses a real danger to that person’s faith and must be avoided according to God’s command. In distinct contrast, the CLC position and counsel in that same situation would be to urge the concerned visitor to leave the false teaching church immediately, as a safeguard to his own spiritual welfare and in obedience to the Lord’s commands “beware of false prophets” and “avoid those who cause divisions and offenses.” Any testimony against the false teaching of that church may and should be done, but not as a necessary prerequisite to terminating fellowship – not when that church has already been identified and acknowledged as a false teaching church according to a proper examination of its teaching and practice. In addition, we believe that Scripture “compels” such persons “to leave that church” because of the false teaching proven to be there, not because “their testimony has been rejected.”

WELS reaction in dealing with “Church Growth” inroads

Concerned members in the WELS have voiced a very real and informed reaction to the inroads made by the so-called “Church Growth” movement within that synod. One may read some very fine testimony at the “IssuesinWELS” web site. One such paper, authored by WELS Prof. Roger Kuerth to a symposium gathered on September 6, 2005, has the title “The Scriptural Doctrine of the ‘Una Sancta’: Confessional Implications for Evangelical Lutheran Ministry – and the Doctrine and Practice of Church Fellowship.”¹⁰ Prof. Kuerth very ably and convincingly shows the inroads that Reformed pietism has made within the WELS in regard to church growth accomplished outside of the framework of the Word and the Sacraments. But as we read the following

paragraphs from that fine assessment, do we not hear the same faulty view advocating the continuation of testimony to the errorists, while maintaining fellowship with them, until one becomes convinced that they are persistent and that more testimony would be of no further avail? Are not these concerned Christians hindered by operating with the same “persistent” *conditio sine qua non*¹¹ baggage with which their forefathers have saddled them? These are a few pertinent paragraphs (emphasis made by Prof. Kuerth):

It is my firm belief, and the firm belief of others in our synod, based on what we have been able to read and hear of late (and believe me when I say we are troubled by some of what we read and hear), that many of the same pietistic principles, practices and problems that have plagued the Lutheran Church in the past have slowly begun to creep back in and plague the Lutheran Church, yes, our beloved WELS. The same or similar *schwärmerisch* arguments and fanatical objections that were once being heard in the church from the lips of men like Melancthon and the Philippists, Spener and the Pietists, Wesley and the Methodists, Arminius and the Arminians, Zinzendorf and the Moravians, Francke and the University of Halle, the “international center of Pietism,” appear now to be heard once again from the lips of very sincere, but very misguided brothers within our own midst. If this is really the case and not just a misunderstanding or misreading of the facts, then our debt of love to them demands NOT that we ignore them, despise them, slander them, nor reject them as brothers – but that we WITNESS to them, INSTRUCT them, HUMBLY and PATIENTLY BEAR WITH THEM, and “Make every effort to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace!”

But, finally, all such fraternal efforts CAN, and at some point, MUST come to an end. And should it become obvious, after patient, loving instruction and repeated admonition, that all such fraternal efforts have finally borne no fruit and failed to unite us on the formal principle of the Evangelical Lutheran Church which is Scripture alone, then God’s Word demands that we who still revere and take seriously that sacred formal principle of Lutheranism, as a matter of confessional principle, regardless of number, name or position, “mark and avoid” them as “false brothers” and “persistent errorists,” just as our forefathers did in the past when they were confronted by the stark reality of false doctrine, division, heresy, and sinful unionism of their own day.

To withhold or break fellowship because of non-doctrinal differences is the sin of separatism. Equally serious is the sin of unionism. This is an agreement to disagree, practicing fellowship without agreement in doctrine. Scripture demands that we separate from errorists. But let us also not hesitate to speak and contend for the truth when it becomes necessary to do so!

Another example to consider has occurred more recently, as we learn from announcements made on behalf of The CHARIS Institute. The CHARIS Institute, Inc., which serves as an arm of the WELS Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, had set up a March 2006 conference advocating Church Growth methods and principles, which was to include speakers who were not only outside of WELS fellowship, but were also deniers of many cardinal truths of Scripture.¹² A visit to the CHARIS web site yielded these explanatory paragraphs as to why the proposed meeting was cancelled. One has the reasonable suspicion that the host organization has not given up for very long its plans either to push for future Church Growth principle symposiums or to invite heterodox speakers. Posted on the “charis.wlc.edu” site and also announced in *CHARIS*, 5:1, on p. 39, we find the following, which begins with the headline “Church Door Symposium Cancelled!”:

Due to the brotherly concerns expressed by numerous clergy and Synod officials around the issue of church fellowship, the 3rd Annual Church Door Symposium has been cancelled. Although the Executive Director and the members of the CHARIS Board of Directors disagree with the judgments that hosting non-WELS speakers represents a violation of Scripture and WELS doctrine, concern for maintaining harmony in the church, coupled with concern for the continued success and vitality of CHARIS and Wisconsin Lutheran College, override any reasons for taking a stand on this issue at this time.

It is an unfortunate fact that great confusion exists among clergy and laity alike around applications of the church fellowship principles. Rather than contribute to this confusion, the leaders of The CHARIS Institute have decided to cancel this year’s symposium. Our prayer is that we will find a way to resolve this confusion about church fellowship so that CHARIS can again host outstanding scholars on relevant subjects in the future without controversy.

WELS counsel in dealing with members of heterodox churches

This article has only scratched the surface in attempting to demonstrate how pervasively the faulty principle of “persistence” has infected WELS doctrine and practice in regard to fellowship and separation. Well over a hundred (often conflicting) examples, on public display online, can demonstrate how WELS leaders continually struggle to fit “persistence” into applications of their fellowship principles. One can visit the site “wels.net,” go to the “Q & A” link, type “persistent errorist” in the search box and read the numerous inquiries answered by a WELS spokesman. The following is one example, not necessarily the worst, chosen at random. The answer quoted from the “wels.net” Q & A link is given in response to this two-part question: “If one of your family members or a friend had recently found a relationship/salvation through Jesus and they started going to a Baptist church, would you still rejoice with them over Jesus as their Savior or tell them they had joined a cult no matter their beliefs on Jesus. Do WELS members think they are the only true Christians?”

A: Thank you for your questions. I invite you to continue to read archived questions and answers, since your questions are answered many times in previous correspondence. I also invite and encourage you to sit down with one of our pastors and ask the same questions. It appears you do not understand what the Bible principles of church fellowship mean or what they do not mean. And I wish you well as you ponder Bible-revealed truths.

We do believe and teach that God forbids his people to express fellowship with those who willfully and persistently cling to error or false teaching.

If a family member or friend – or anyone we know about – recently was brought to know Jesus as his Savior, we would rejoice with him, encourage him, and pledge ourselves to help him grow in his faith and Bible knowledge. If he began to attend a church that does not share our doctrinal confession, we would strive to determine if he does this as a result of ignorance or weakness in understanding and if he is open to continued study of Scripture on the subject. If so, we would not forbid expressions of fellowship with him (especially in private, to avoid giving others a wrong impression or causing them to stumble because we might appear to be ignoring his public confession). Our goal, in love, is to instruct, strengthen, and foster his grasp on the truth and to lead him to reject all error.

If acceptance or toleration of false doctrine continues despite adequate instruction and after pertinent Bible testimony is patiently brought to him, we would consider him a willful or persistent errorist, and we are not allowed by God to ignore that and express church fellowship with him. We must testify against any and all error as sin against God and a danger to souls. And we do this even if there is evidence that the errorist continues to profess Christ as Savior and Redeemer. Christian fellowship may graciously be maintained by the Holy Spirit, but expressions of that fellowship are not allowed by the same Spirit under these circumstances. So we would continue to give thanks that there is evidence the person is embracing the gospel of Jesus Christ, but would grieve over the mixture of truth with error in his public confession.

Finally, we do not use the term “cult” when referring to other Christian churches and we do not think we are the “only true Christians.”

Although the questioner above is obviously confused about biblical principles of fellowship, the confusion must have been compounded by the responder, who attempts to fit an answer into the “willful” and “persistent” mold with which the WELS has saddled him. He concludes that the hypothetical convert, while attending a Baptist church, can be fellowshiped with as long as one’s subjective judgment evaluates his heterodox involvement to be the “result of ignorance or weakness in understanding.” He attempts to cover his tracks, however, by advising that one should keep any such expressions of fellowship private, so as not to give others a “wrong impression.” Even worse, he further reinforces the WELS teaching and practice that patient instruction and testimony must enter the process, which in effect take the place of the simple command to *watch out for* (skopein) individuals or groups *who cause divisions and offenses*. Meanwhile, fellowship with the heterodox continues until one decides that the instruction and testimony have been adequate and patient enough and that the adherence to error has nevertheless continued. By this time we start to wonder if the questioner or the hypothetical Baptist can possibly know which end is up.

It is truly difficult for this writer (and perhaps the readers too) to believe that the WELS fellowship doctrine and practice have really become that corrupted since the false teaching developed in the 1950s and 1960s. But the leaven spreading throughout the lump of dough, we believe, cannot be denied.

Some reflections, conclusions and projections

Was the term “persistent” originally added as necessary to ensure that an errorist (or erring church body) was given, on the basis of human judgment, adequate time to give an unequivocal answer to such grave charges? It is difficult to answer precisely. We do submit, however, that the added term “persistent,” along with all other synonymous expressions employed in WELS usage, has proven to be a “red herring,” a distraction which historically and also currently has led to unscriptural delays, for in effect it has injected invalid human judgment into the identifying process before the action which Scripture calls for can take place.

Permit some personal reflection on a painful but necessary withdrawal from my former church body. When some of my immediate siblings consulted their WELS pastors regarding the withdrawal of me and others from the WELS and the Synodical Conference in the late 1950s and early 1960s, we believe it was a “cheap shot” for those pastors so contacted to reply simply that so-and-so had “jumped the gun.” Thus the point at which separation with the LCMS must take place was rather crassly relegated to the subjective backwaters of mere human judgment. And all those who withdrew with heavy hearts and for sake of conscience were branded with a cheap label – not as those who were given the grace to perceive and address an unscriptural position by being obedient to God’s directive to “avoid them,” but as those who were simply impatient with the process of determining “persistence.”

Putting the current WELS fellowship doctrine and practice to the test, some questions need to be asked, which may only be answered as the future unfolds. Is a person to be considered no longer responsible for the public confession of the church body in which he holds membership? Is such responsibility merely an outmoded concept, which simply does not fit the times and needs today? Must we endeavor from now on to judge hearts – what we perceive as “weakness of faith” – in order to identify a Christian with whom we should then vigorously practice all forms of fellowship? If that is to be the case, should such fellowship not also include Open Communion? Can WELS members now fellowship with any and all people who are not persistent errorists, but merely by their willingness to listen are to be considered weak Christians with whom all forms of fellowship should be practiced all the more vigorously? Though we are to be ready to give an answer, with meekness and fear, to all who ask us about the reason for the hope within us (1 Pet. 3:15), at what point does our willingness and even eagerness to instruct any who come to us interfere in another man’s Christian ministry? Will there not be the real danger of gross proselytizing and even the danger of tampering with the doctrine of the divine call? We doubt that any among our fellowship are ready to rewrite those parts of section VI in our *CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose* which publicly, and in stark contrast to the confusion existing in the WELS, state:

4. We are indeed edified and heartened by every testimony, written or spoken, which truly confesses, teaches, preaches and glorifies the Gospel of Christ. But we reject and condemn the false ecumenism which would require us to make common cause in worship and church work with those who, while claiming the Christian name, or even the Lutheran name, publicly adhere to that which contradicts God’s clear Word in whole or in part. We equally condemn separatism – that is, a schismatic withdrawal from others for a reason or purpose not in accord with God’s revealed Will.

5. We do not deny, but joyfully acknowledge that the Lord knows His elect, even though some are unwitting captives in false-teaching churches where, by their membership, they are partaking of a confession of error and are subjected to grave spiritual danger. We pray that all who now truly believe may persevere in that faith to the end and thus obtain everlasting life.

It is not with “I-told-you-so” satisfaction that we witness a once cherished fellowship continuing to endanger itself by a process that abandons the Lord’s way of warding off causers of divisions and offenses, thus safeguarding His flock in the one true faith. Still, we wonder how far the yeast of “persistence” has spread throughout the whole batch of dough; we wonder what other doctrines have been affected by its influence. Some within the WELS are in protest against the pan-Lutheran activities of Thrivent, in which by their membership they support that fraternal benefit society’s churchly function of rather lavishly funding ELCA pastors and projects and supporting not only Church Growth principles, but gay causes, the ordination of women, abortion rights, etc. One hears of strong voices within the WELS advocating women’s roles in pastoral functions. And as reported in a recent *CHARIS* announcement, “it is an unfortunate fact that great confusion exists among clergy and laity alike around applications of the church fellowship principles.” Indeed, a cousin of mine in the WELS pastoral ministry decries what he deems to be missing in his synod’s current fellowship discussions:

Other arguments have been made as well, but virtually all of them limit the doctrine of fellowship

merely to guarding against being led astray by false teaching. That is a part of the doctrine which can be stated as concern for our own faith. We ourselves have a love for the word and desire to remain strong in faith. Therefore we need to be careful of false teaching.

There are however at least two other concerns that no one I have read has mentioned. The first has to do with love for the false teacher, who is also a blood bought soul. The loving thing that the doctrine of fellowship leads us to do is to avoid him so that the trumpet gives a clear sound. It tells him: You are endangering your own faith by your false teaching. We will avoid you and your teaching out of love for you so that you will realize how serious your departure from God's word is. It is serious enough to keep us from having fellowship together.

The second issue that no one is mentioning is the love that the doctrine of fellowship leads us to show to those who would sit at the feet of the false teacher. Our avoidance of him says to them: This man is a false teacher. Keep away from him. Do not sit at his feet.¹³

As with the preceding quote, we may recognize forces at work within the WELS to return to the *old paths*. One can search "The Motley Magpie.org" and "Issuesinwels.org" and "wels.net" or simply Google "protesting fellowship" for such evidence, with ongoing updates. Some of my relatives are WELS pastors involved with questioning the "Church Growth" movement. May our Lord lead them, as well as many others, away from the pitfalls of being forever the dissenting minority, as in the case of the so-called "conservatives" within the LCMS. They continue on and on, trying to turn around a lost cause by testifying from within the building which is burning out of control, instead of being personally obedient to the directives of Scripture to get out of the burning building.

Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen'" (Jer. 6:16-17).

During my ministry I have been privileged to instruct many adults with the course "Learn From Me," which is now available on the CLC web site. When it came to the topic of our fellowship practices, one woman terminated her instructions with an exasperated outburst: "I can't stand being so fenced in!" I was filled with recriminations to the charge of being a possible contributor to her cancellation of classes. And I trust that I have been forgiven for any lack of evangelical applications. But the more one thinks about it, the more one may appreciate the woman's assessment that the separation principle in the doctrine of church fellowship results in some intentional, protective "fencing" for the sheep of His pasture. Our Lord "fences us in" with the fellowship doctrine to keep us in the green pastures of His pure Word and Sacraments. Thus He protects us from the poisonous weeds of false teachers, who are sent by the "roaring lion," and as we are warned, these may appear as "angels of light," even within one's own visible fellowship.

If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle? (1 Cor. 14:8). May the "red herring" of "persistence," as well as any other words and phrases being used as reasons for delaying an action which simple obedience to the Word of God commands, be forever expunged from identifying and taking action over against false teachers and errorists.

Endnotes

¹ Pastor Emeritus Bertram Naumann presented the original material of this article as a regional pastoral conference paper in the spring of 2006. Editorial revisions have been made with his permission.

² As an example consider the following excerpt from Prof. John Pfeiffer's review of the book *A Tale of Two Synods* (cf. *Journal of Theology*, 44:1, March 2004, p. 51):

A word should be said about the use of the expression "persistent errorist," an expression which Prof. Braun uses repeatedly in his book and which is used repeatedly in WELS' publications. In light of the history of the WELS since 1958, it would be a mistake to think that the term "errorist" refers to a weak brother who has fallen into error, while the expression "persistent errorist" refers to a false teacher. Prior to 1958 this may have been the intent of those who used this expression. However, official declarations and convention resolutions, as well as official practice, have shown that this is no longer the meaning of this expression.

Since Wisconsin adopted its new doctrine on fellowship, the use of the word "persistent" has

taken on a new significance. This term is used to describe the kind of false teacher that one should avoid. In the “mouth” of Wisconsin, the expression “persistent errorist” has come to mean “a false teacher who is adjudged to be rejecting admonition.” In contrast, an “errorist” would be “a false teacher who continues to listen to admonition” [Formulation of definitions mine – JP]. Under such definitions, one can continue in fellowship with an errorist (false teacher), but not with a persistent errorist (recalcitrant false teacher).

³ In correspondence to Bertram Naumann, Pastor Fleischer also wrote, “I agree that the word ‘persistence’ is a weasel word.... For me it is simple. We do not need the word. We do not call an erring teacher an errorist until we have indeed ascertained the situation through testing, etc. Once it is determined that he is not misspeaking or not misunderstanding, but is teaching and is defending his error, he is an errorist. Persistence has nothing to do with it. To me the expression ‘persistent errorist’ is a redundancy....”

⁴ *CHARIS* describes itself as a quarterly journal published by The CHARIS Institute, Inc., which is affiliated with and located on the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran College. Also, within the Braun quotation words enclosed in brackets are provided by Pastor Naumann for the sake of clarification.

⁵ Wisconsin Lutheran College is a four-year liberal arts college affiliated with the WELS and located in Milwaukee. The non-member choir policy is mentioned and defended in the article quoted from *CHARIS*, Lent 2005, 4:2, p. 33, with emphasis indicated in italics by Mark Braun and John E. Bauer.

⁶ Prof. Kuehne’s recollections and comments, expressed in an E-mail on January 29, 2001, came about in reaction to the article “The WELS and the CLC: Is There a Doctrinal Difference?” (John F. Brug, *WLQ*, Winter 2001, 98:1, pp. 62-67).

⁷ “It’s a Different World—Or Is It?” *CHARIS*, Fall 2003, 3:1, pp. 27-28, emphasis added by Mark Braun.

⁸ David Lau’s assessment can be found in his conference paper “Evaluation of Recent (1990 and Following) Statements of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod (WELS) on Fellowship.”

⁹ John F. Brug, “Can There Ever Be Exceptions to Our Regular Fellowship Practices that Do Not Violate Scripture’s Fellowship Principles?” Part I, *WLQ*, Summer 2002, 99:3, p. 168. With Pastor Naumann’s permission the editor has added the quoted *WLQ* material and its subsequent evaluation to this article.

¹⁰ The “Study Papers” link on the “IssuesinWELS.org” web site, from which the quoted material was obtained, has the opening disclaimer: “The following papers were presented for discussion. The papers in so far as they contain analysis of the issues, are not to be construed as position statements of the group as a whole.”

¹¹ Latin for the *condition without which not*, i.e., the necessary condition for something.

¹² According to an announcement made in *CHARIS*, 4:4, on p. 21, the three keynote speakers were going to be Dr. Aubrey Malphurs, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and president of Vision Ministries International; Dr. Kent Hunter, a church consultant and pastor in the LCMS; and Dr. Waldo Werning, a retired LCMS pastor and author.

¹³ This quotation from the editorial “Things to Consider about False Teachers” can be found on the “Points of View” link of the “IssuesinWELS.org” website.

Ministering to Those with Bipolar Depression

Terrel Kesterson

Bipolar depression, also known as bipolar disorder, bipolar disease and manic depression, typically manifests itself in two ways; the afflicted person experiences mania and depression. Someone with depression alone is not bipolar. Someone with manic episodes alone may be bipolar. Sometimes the mania and depression occur simultaneously, sometimes alternately. Some experts believe that manic-depressive disease is hereditary.¹

Those experiencing mania feel overly happy to euphoric, are irritable, have mood swings and may be unable to sleep. Their thoughts and words come at high speed, and they have trouble concentrating. Someone in a manic state is totally driven. He is on a physical and mental “high” and cannot slow down. He cannot stop himself from acting out, yelling, slamming doors, etc. An episode of mania can evidence itself in a person “going on a tear,” demonstrating one or more of the following: decreased inhibition, grandiose delusions and an increased sense of self-importance (convinced he is “on a mission” to accomplish big, important things); there

may even be paranoid delusions in some cases. A person experiencing a manic episode may spend money *extravagantly* (actual examples include buying another car or another house on impulse!), or he may have sexually promiscuous encounters, which sometimes result in contracting AIDS or another sexually transmitted disease. The manic episode may lead to using drugs, drinking alcohol excessively, writing excessively, or demonstrating risky or bizarre behavior, which is unrelated to or occurring as an overreaction to the reality of his actual circumstances. In some the mania can lead to creative highs. Someone experiencing a manic episode may say he is not, claiming that this time things are different. (Try helping someone with a problem who believes he does not have a problem!) Do not be fooled by his words; observe the way he is acting. In most cases, when someone with bipolar disorder gets treatment, he becomes more aware of the fact that he has bipolar disorder. Thus we serve him well by helping him obtain the appropriate treatment.

Manic episodes can often be prevented through medication. In fact, if someone who is bipolar does not take his medication, he will end up having an episode of mania. The most common reason for someone with bipolar disorder to avoid taking his medication – whether consciously or subconsciously – is that he wants to experience the “high” of a manic episode. Other reasons individuals with manic-depressive illness stop taking their medication can be fear of becoming drug-dependent, delusions, denial of their illness, depression, confusion caused by the disease, or a poor doctor-patient relationship.

In ministering to those with bipolar depression, it is ESSENTIAL that we understand that the mania they experience is extremely seductive to them. During episodes of mania they have limitless energy and need only a few hours of sleep; they experience their senses more intensely than other people do; they believe themselves to be wealthy and they feel like a VIP. Because of these factors those with bipolar disorder are severely tempted not to want to overcome their disease. Much like a drug addict who craves his drug-induced states of euphoria, they actually want to remain in their illness so as to feel the “highs” of the manic episodes. And as they focus on and crave the manic highs, they tend to forget all the pain they cause themselves and their loved ones by their disease.²

The price which the bipolar person can pay for his manic episodes is the chaos and even death that this illness can bring. Depression, even profound depression, typically follows the manic state of euphoria. Someone in a state of depression feels totally hopeless and empty, unable to feel any joy or pleasure. He constantly dwells on his shortcomings and sins, his feelings of worthlessness and even self-hatred. He may possibly become suicidal. If he expresses suicidal thoughts, especially if he has a plan to carry them out, see to it that weapons, drugs and other things he may use to kill himself are removed from him. Inform his doctor immediately. He will probably be put into a hospital until his suicidal episode has passed.

An individual’s bipolar depression is devastating to the other members of his family. They are torn between their love for him and the chaos he can put them through while experiencing the episodes of his mania and depression. His behavior can make his family members feel very angry and resentful toward him. If he is spending extravagantly, he can actually bankrupt his family’s assets. It is also essential, while ministering to those with bipolar depression, that we minister to their families as well.

Bipolar depression is a treatable mental disorder. The majority of manic-depressives can get help to the point that their disease does not control their life. With treatment they can progress from being non-functioning individuals to becoming people with an illness they can manage, whose disease interferes much less in their life. The long-term results of treating manic-depressive illness is that 25% recover completely, 55-65% recover partially and 10-20% have continuing symptoms with a poor outcome.³

Lithium and other mood stabilizing drugs are very effective in helping people with mania. Lithium, in particular, helps 50-70% of manics. Lithium is a simple salt found in nature. Since it is not a sedative, it does not interfere with intellectual activity or normal emotions. Because of its other side effects, however, patients often stop taking it. The common side effects of lithium include thirst, retaining water, fatigue, mental sluggishness, problems with memory, shaky hands and certain skin conditions.⁴ Other drug treatments for mania involve the patient using anticonvulsant or antipsychotic drugs. For some individuals electric shock therapy is an effective treatment for severe depression as well as for severe mania which has not responded to drug treatment.⁵

Treatment of bipolar depression can be very expensive, especially if the individual needs to be hospitalized. If he has also been spending extravagantly during his manic episodes, the total cost of treatment and recovery can be quite devastating.⁶

Psychotherapy can also be an important part of helping someone with bipolar disorder. “Psychotherapy ... is not essential, and many patients do fine without it – especially if they have a strong support network.”

Psychotherapy is not “of much value unless the person is also taking medication.”⁷ Therapy involves determining what constitutes the disease and who the patient is. Finding a good doctor is absolutely essential in helping someone with bipolar depression. If one doctor is not helping him, he needs to keep looking until he finds one who does.⁸

Several years ago this writer was talking to his pastor about a problem he had at the time. When he finished telling his pastor what was bothering him, the pastor asked him, “So, what are you going to do about it?” What profound words! Whatever situation we find ourselves in, whatever problems we may have, we inevitably need to ask ourselves, “What am I going to do about it?” Wishing that our situation were somehow different is not going to change it. We have to face the reality of our problems, and with the Lord’s help seek to do something about them.

Jesus asked the invalid man at the pool, “*Do you want to be made well?*” (John 5:6). If it were anyone else asking that question, surely we would say, “What kind of dumb question is that? Of course, an invalid would like to be well!” But it was Jesus asking the question, and He was doing so with the goal of addressing both physical and spiritual needs. Did the man want to keep trying his own way in hopeless frustration, or did he want to get well? When he relied on Jesus, Jesus healed him. Likewise, Jesus asks each of us, “Do you want to be made well?” We all have our own problems. Do we want to stay stuck in our rut? Do we want to try to run our own lives and do things our own way, which does not actually change things for the better? Or do we want Jesus’ help to truly get better?

In ministering to the bipolar person, or for that matter, anyone else with a problem, we need to realize that if the person doesn’t want to get better, he won’t. Trying to help someone who has a problem but doesn’t want help is like pushing a boulder up a hill—a lot of pain and discouragement, and nothing to show for the effort. Of course, everyone with a problem wishes that the problem were gone. But the only way to truly overcome such problems is the willingness to seek the Lord’s help and the resolve to do what needs to be done to overcome the problems we have.

With the Lord’s help most people with bipolar depression can IMPROVE! The Lord “*heals ALL our diseases*” (Ps. 103:3). As we seek to put the problem, difficulty or affliction into His hands, the Lord will either take away what bothers us or give us whatever we need to accept it, cope with it and find contentment in living our life under His care. Thus someone with bipolar depression needs to keep praying to God to help him improve. “*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!*” (Matt. 7:7-11 NIV). The bipolar person needs to find a doctor who can help him. He needs to take his medication regularly and not “go off his meds,” because he doesn’t want to give up the manic “highs.” He needs to hear and study God’s Word regularly. He needs to turn to his pastor and other good Christian friends and family members for support, encouragement and help. “*Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” (Gal. 6:2). With the Lord’s help he needs to do whatever responsible, good, constructive things he can, whenever he can. “*Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you*” (Phil. 4:8-9).

In ministering to someone with a mental affliction such as bipolar depression, understand that he cannot simply “pull himself together” and “snap out of it.” He can, however, with the Lord’s help, do the things needed to improve his life and not let his disease control his actions. We do not excuse wrong and irresponsible things that someone with bipolar depression does while having a manic episode or experiencing depression. At the same time, we need to understand that he has an underlying condition which is affecting him. We need to focus our efforts on addressing the disease itself, and not just the symptoms. For instance, we won’t help a manic-depressive stop spending extravagantly by dealing solely with his spending habits. But if we help him deal with his disease, he will be more able to control his own spending. We need to talk to him and let him “get things off his chest.” We need to get to know him and understand him and his bipolar condition better. We need to keep praying to God for wisdom and help, so that we can minister to this individual under our spiritual care. “*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him*” (Jas. 1:5 NIV). We also need to pray for the afflicted person, asking God to help him and give him healing,

knowing that “*the things which are impossible with men are possible with God*” (Luke 18:27).

Helpful books on bipolar depression are available at the library.⁹ It may also be helpful to seek advice from mental health professionals,¹⁰ from fellow pastors who have ministered to people with bipolar depression and from family members of people with bipolar depression.

Endnotes

¹ Currently there is no conclusive research which supports a hereditary-only cause. There is evidence which suggests several environmental components that can lead to bipolar depression, e.g. various types of head trauma or exposure to certain types of chemicals (Marzofka).

² Torrey and Knable, 263-265.

³ Torrey and Knable, 101.

⁴ Lithium is considered the “gold standard” of bipolar treatment. No other medication does as well in minimizing the manic cycles as lithium does. However, as a salt it has a significant impact on the liver and requires consistent blood work to monitor lithium levels and avoid liver damage. Lithium must be taken throughout the lifetime of the person who has bipolar depression. Over time people tend to “forget” to have their blood work done. Or they stop taking the medication because they feel better, and this results in relapse (Marzofka).

⁵ ECT (Electroconvulsive therapy) is another treatment that requires medical monitoring during and after the sessions. ECT has short-term side effects such as memory loss, confusion and lethargy. Typically these symptoms are monitored in the treatment hospital. With the advent of outpatient therapies some psychiatric services and some insurance companies have found that outpatient ECT is an effective treatment alternative to the more expensive inpatient treatment. However, this treatment option requires a high functioning support network which is comfortable with the issues surrounding the side effects of ECT. If you find yourself in a situation in which you are being asked to be a part of an outpatient support team, make sure you are not the primary contact or team leader during the first few times. These situations can go quickly from good to very bad (Marzofka).

⁶ Typically without insurance the bipolar person is released within several hours of admission to a hospital. If the patient has expressed suicidal thinking, he will be held for 72 hours to stabilize him. Again, note that insurance plays a significant role in the treatment such a person will receive (Marzofka).

⁷ Torrey and Knable, 207.

⁸ The individual may not need psychotherapy for a recovery from bipolar depression. However, the support network of family and friends surrounding the patient should have access to good information about the patient’s condition and what can be expected at different points in the treatment process. There are many groups of people (e.g. Bipolar Support Alliance) who offer information and support to the support people, rather than the patient. The Bipolar Support Alliance is not psychotherapy or group therapy, but simply people with something in common getting together and sharing their experiences and ideas. Typically people come and go intermittently as they need additional information or support.

⁹ The writer found the book *Surviving Manic Depression* to be particularly helpful.

¹⁰ The writer wishes to acknowledge and thank Dean Marzofka (Master of Science with major in Marriage and Family Therapy) for his very helpful input.

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