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Jubilee Sermonettes for Reformation

Peter Reim, James Sandeen, and Paul Fleischer

* Preached originally in 2009 at a joint CLC Reformation service, the following addresses were based on texts and themes connected to the three main words in the church body's name, the Church of the Lutheran Confession. In view of the Reformation season of this Jubilee year, the *Journal* offers the sermonettes below in the order in which they were preached by Pastors Peter Reim (Loveland, CO), James Sandeen (Westminster, CO), and Paul Fleischer (Cheyenne, WY).

Church of the Lutheran Confession: The meaning of Church

Romans 16:16b: *The churches of Christ greet you.*

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus:

In a gathering like this, especially one where we are very mindful of the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, it's probably not surprising that we quote from Romans 16. But it may be a surprise to hear that we aren't going to read verse 17. We'll read part of verse 16: "***The churches of Christ greet you.***" Yes, right before the "mark and avoid" passage we have this friendly little greeting to the church at Rome from several other churches that were in contact with the Apostle Paul.

Yet that greeting can raise a question too. We often speak of the teaching that there is one Holy Christian Church. But Paul here mentions a number of churches. How many churches are there?

At the time of the Reformation that was a burning question, in part because if you got the answer wrong, you yourself might end up burning, or so it was taught. The church of the Middle Ages, the church virtually everybody in western Europe had grown up with, was preaching and teaching things that were false and misleading. One of the many souls troubled and distressed over the lack of relief he found in the Catholic Church's answer to the sin question was, of course, Martin Luther. We thank God to this very day that He worked things out so that this Luther, this German monk, would come to know

the Scripture's teaching on salvation by grace alone through faith alone. What he found in Scripture for himself and shared with countless others has truly been a singular blessing for the entire world.

But that revelation of gospel truth left him and his fellow workers in a tough position. The only church they had known all of their lives was bent on silencing people who challenged its teaching. Was this really Christ's church?

We also thank God, then, that through continued study of Scripture they came to have a refreshingly clear picture of the true, scriptural meaning of the Church. First, they recognized that the true Church was Christ's Church and no one else's. In Matthew 16 they read: "*Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (16:18 KJV). And in Ephesians 5 they learned of its pure and holy character, since "*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.*" The Church, as the Reformers came to understand it, is not the Roman Catholic or the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is an invisible assembly that only includes all true believers, those who belong to Christ through faith, as created and preserved by the Holy Spirit.

This was the only Church they had to concern themselves with, for being driven out of the body of the Roman Catholic Church, even being excommunicated by the pope, did not have any effect on their place as believers in the one Holy Christian Church.

At the same time they realized that the Bible does indeed speak about churches in another sense: any assembly where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name (Matt. 18:20). Anywhere that the Word and Sacraments are found, doing their Spirit-worked activity of creating and preserving faith, a church of believers is there, be it in Rome, Jerusalem, Ephesus, or a little house church on the south side of Corinth. But how does that work? Put very briefly, the Bible calls these local assemblies "churches" because in such groups there are found members of the Holy Christian Church. It was the true believers in any group gathered around the means of grace that led the Spirit to call them "the church at" such and such a place (Acts 11:22, 13:1, Rom. 16:1, 1 Cor. 1:2, etc.). The believers in each such group were the ones who belonged to the Lord and served Him in truth. They were saints and priests of the Lord. They had the ministry of the keys in their hands; they had the heart-changing, heaven-opening power of the gospel at their disposal. Whether young or old, educated or not, rich or poor, they were, as the Reformers taught, true priests and ministers before the Lord.

Five centuries later, when controversies arose in the mid-20th century among the Lutherans in the once-united Synodical Conference, a number of men and women—saints and priests of the Lord also—were conscience-bound to separate from the false teaching of their former Lutheran bodies. One issue that lurked somewhat in the background had to do with the doctrine of the Church. Some, largely in the Missouri Synod, were teaching that only a local congregation could really be a "church" in the sense used by Paul when he says, "*The churches of Christ greet you.*" In their view only the assembly of Christians meeting in a localized place could function as a true reflection of the Holy Christian Church. A larger organization, such as a synod or a conference of synods—it was maintained—was not local and could not be considered "church," even though it certainly contained many faithful believers. This distinction was more than a matter of semantics. It opened the door to a sort of cafeteria mindset in which the larger body could tolerate varying degrees of confessional faithfulness or aberration within its organization. In one town, for example, one might find a fairly confessional Lutheran church, while down the road there might be a more liberal church, but both could be members of the same synod. No longer was complete agreement in doctrine and practice a prerequisite for confessional fellowship within the synod because the synod was not "church."

This confusion about identifying a larger organization like synod as church was a valid concern to those who were meeting in those days when our own church body was forming. The scriptural concept of the church warranted a clear study and confession on the part of those who were uniting. This study affirmed that even a non-local assembly which contains believers is fed by Word and Sacrament and

labors in the work of the gospel, and thus is indeed a “church” and has the same authority of the keys as a congregation. This study and statement became one of our confessional documents, expressed in the booklet “Concerning Church and Ministry.”

In taking the name *Church of the Lutheran Confession*, we reflect that we are indeed a church with all the authority and privileges granted by the Holy Spirit to the churches to carry on the work of the gospel. We are empowered by the Lord to call teachers, missionaries, and other servants. We are able to administer the sacrament, for example, at a convention service. We are blessed to function with one voice as Christians, not only in our local churches but also together in our CLC. And so we pray that the Spirit cause our entire fellowship to hold faithfully to His Truth, to resist all error in the years to come, and to prosper in our proclamation of the gospel, which remains as the constant bedrock on which every church of Christ is built. Amen.

Church of the Lutheran Confession: Recalling our Lutheran heritage

Ephesians 2:8-9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Fellow redeemed, may the grace of God in Christ be your comfort this day and always, as it has ever been to God’s children.

As members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, let us always celebrate, first of all and above all, that it is by God’s grace that we can even call ourselves “Church,” that is, believers in Jesus Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, who have been brought into the “household of faith” by the same Holy Spirit. Truly it is God Himself who has called us “Church” and made us His Church.

But we also celebrate the grace of God in connection with the blessing that we are Lutheran Christians and call ourselves such. We call ourselves *Lutheran* because we take seriously our Lutheran heritage, which is summarized in the Reformation principles: by Grace alone, by Faith alone, and by Scripture alone.

1) Our text from Ephesians 2 wonderfully presents these principles. It proclaims that one is saved by the grace of God, His underserved mercy and love, which He freely gives us. *Grace* has been defined by some in the form of an acronym: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. Grace, as Scripture describes it, is purely a gift of God; it is nothing that can be earned or deserved.

Recall the struggles of Luther in his early life to gain God’s favor by his own works, just as his priest and the Roman Catholic Church had taught him. Luther later said: “I was a good man, and kept the rules of my order so strictly that I can claim: If ever a man got to heaven through monasticism, I was that man . . . and yet my conscience was never at peace. The more I tried to remedy my condition . . . the more troubled my conscience became.”

By God’s grace through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Luther finally found peace of conscience when he came to understand that the grace of God was simply the favor of God toward man for Jesus’ sake alone and not for the sake of our works.

And so we call ourselves *Lutheran* because, as Luther, we believe that salvation is by Grace alone!

2) Luther was also led by the Holy Spirit to appreciate that even personal faith in Christ is itself a gift from God’s grace. Our passage says as much: that faith, as well as salvation, is “**not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works.** . . .” Luther wrote in one of his sermons: “Faith is the Yes of the heart, a conviction on which one stakes one’s life. On what does faith rest? On Christ, born of a woman, made

under the Law, who died, etc. To this confession I say Yes with the full confidence of my heart. Christ came for my sake, in order to free me from the Law, not only from the guilt of sin but also from the power of the Law. If you are able to say Yes to this, you have what is called faith. . . . But this faith does not grow by our own powers. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit is present and writes it in the heart.”

We call ourselves *Lutheran* also because we believe that salvation is by Faith alone!

3) Earlier in his letter to the Ephesians the apostle wrote: “*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. . .*” (Eph 1:13). And to the Romans he concluded: “*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. 10:17).

Likewise, Luther proclaimed in one of his sermons: “Faith is an unceasing and constant looking which turns the eyes upon nothing but Christ, the Victor over sin and death and the Giver of righteousness, salvation, and life eternal. This is why Paul, in his epistles, sets Jesus Christ before us and teaches about Him in almost every single verse. But he sets Him before us through the Word, for in no other way can He be apprehended except by faith in the Word.”

Luther maintained that a Christian trusts the authority of the Word of God alone without question: “. . . Christians should simply cling to the Word alone and not argue as to whether God is lying or telling the truth. They are simply to believe it because Christ says it” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 1, p. 214). Luther also reasoned: “Nor should we let men toy with Scripture, juggle the Word of God, and make it submit to being explained, twisted, stretched, and revised to suit people or to achieve peace and union; for then there should be no secure or stable foundation on which consciences might rely” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 3, p. 1475). Those who deny that all of Scripture is the Word of God make God a liar!

We call ourselves *Lutheran* because we believe that salvation by Grace alone through Faith alone comes through Scripture alone!

In conclusion we may do well to examine ourselves with regard to our Lutheran heritage. Do we know what we believe and what it means to be genuinely Lutheran? Are we fading in our appreciation for our Lutheran Christian faith? Do we even care about our distinctive Lutheran faith, our CLC Lutheran faith? Are we still willing to call a spade a spade when we see the doctrine of Christ, God’s Word, and the Lutheran name abused?

Martin Luther resisted papal tyranny on the one hand and liberal Reformed theology on the other and suffered the consequences; yet the gracious Lord preserved him steadfast in faith to his blessing and ours, and finally by His grace the Lord delivered him to his heavenly home.

We are living in an age in which—if we care at all for our Lutheran heritage of justification by Grace alone, though Faith in Jesus Christ alone, proclaimed by Scripture alone—we must stand up without fear against the enemies of that doctrine which abound today, even within the Lutheran Church.

And Scripture warns that such may arise even from among our own selves (Acts 20:30). Luther observed: “Our church will not be endangered as greatly by the oppressive measures of tyrants as by the indifference of our own people” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 2, p. 870).

May our gracious God give us fervent love for His Church and His truth, so that we rededicate ourselves to preserving for ourselves and future generations the distinctly Scriptural and Lutheran principles of Grace alone, Faith alone, and Scripture alone! In adhering to these principles may we then be what our name declares: the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Amen.

**Church of the Lutheran Confession:
What it means that we are “confessional”**

Acts 4:12, 19-20: “*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given*

among men by which we must be saved.” (19) . . . “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge, for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Fellow observers of the Lutheran Reformation:

Someone may say to us: “A denomination called the ‘Church of the Lutheran Confession’? So your synod claims to be a ‘church’? What’s the big deal in that? So do countless other Christian congregations and synods around the globe. Your synod claims to be ‘Lutheran’? What’s the big deal again? That label fits many other groups and synods around the world too.” Well, our first two speakers have reminded us, haven’t they, that there is much more meaning to the terms “Church” and “Lutheran” than most people, even many church-going people, understand. Imagine then the same person asking us: “*So what’s the meaning of the term ‘Confession’ in your synod’s name?*” This is the question we now hope to answer.

Fifty years ago, when our synod’s founding fathers chose our synodical name, the significance of that term “Confession” was explained in this way: “We say *Confession* because our faith must be a living faith, unashamed of its God. We want to confess its Author and Preserver before both friend and foe, that His name be hallowed in the hearts and lives of all” (*Lutheran Spokesman*, Sept. 1960, p. 2). It is my privilege today to underscore the fact that our synod as a whole, each congregation within that synod, and each individual member thereof is called upon to be *confessional*—that is, to be “*unashamed of [our] God . . . before both friend and foe*” so that the name of our God, His Word, is ever hallowed among us.

A week ago Friday [Oct. 23, 2009] our local Cheyenne newspaper carried an article about two pastors in our city, one a Presbyterian and the other a liberal ELCA Lutheran who are—get this!—serving as co-pastors of the Presbyterian church. They are, the article said, “working to reconcile the differences between denominations, because in the end, we all worship the same God, they say. . . .” The article continued: “*Belief in Jesus as Savior is the only belief that truly matters, they said. The other traditions and beliefs that have caused rifts between and within denominations are simply ‘paraphernalia’ . . .*” I checked the dictionary definition of the word “paraphernalia.” It means “personal belongings or equipment.” By that definition I suppose, then, that religious “paraphernalia” would be traditions and beliefs that are of no particular use to anyone other than maybe yourself.

Fellow confessional Lutherans, such is the view of many today even in the mainstream churches. You caught the words “they say . . . they said” in that newspaper article? It seems that even the religious news editor understood that what these two pastors were saying was *their* religious paraphernalia—if you will— their personal tradition or beliefs. Now on our part as confessional Lutherans we surely believe that a confession of Jesus as the Savior is basic and all-important. Yet at the same time we believe that, as our CLC Directory puts it, “*we are not at liberty to change a single teaching of Scripture,*” as though any Scriptural teachings are mere religious paraphernalia! Our CLC church family believes and confesses that the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God and that we should not be ashamed to confess its holy teachings “before friend or foe.” We believe this is so because we know that “*a little leaven leavens the whole lump*” (Gal. 5:9) and that it is, in fact, the gospel of Christ crucified and risen again which Satan desires to scuttle, to undermine—both within our individual hearts and collectively within our CLC church family!

I chose the text I read as one of many biblical examples of what it means to be confessional. The Lord’s apostles Peter and John in the book of Acts, when called on the carpet by the church leaders and threatened with imprisonment by the high council, would not deny their faith in a crucified and risen Christ, but rather confessed: “**Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. . . . Whether it is right in the sight of God to**

listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Biblical examples of such a bold confession of the truth of God before friend and foe could be multiplied, couldn't they? We think of the confessional stands taken by prophets such as Elijah, who said, **“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him”** (1 Kings 18:21). Likewise, Jeremiah who was thrown into a pit for his faithful confession of God's truth, and Daniel thrown into the lions' den, and many others. Joshua called upon God's people (his friends) to **“choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”** (Josh. 24:15).

I trust we would agree that the LORD JESUS Himself was confessional before friend and foe, warning His disciples against false teachers who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15). Another time after some of His “hard sayings,” many of Jesus' one-time disciples went away and walked no more with Him (John 6:66). Dear friends, when Jesus said, **“The Scripture cannot be broken”** (John 10:35) and **“Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it”** (Luke 11:28), and when He gave His Great Commission instructing His followers to teach **“them to observe ALL THINGS that I have commanded you”** (Matt. 28:20), does it sound like those who desire to be His faithful followers will consider ANY Bible teachings as expendable religious paraphernalia?! Surely the Lord's New Testament apostles did not think so! Our chosen text is just one example of their being boldly confessional before their enemies; and we could even mention St. Paul one time confronting his friend Peter when he was to be blamed for an act of hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11ff.).

The whole point is that no objective reading of Holy Scripture allows for the prevailing and politically correct view today that the truths of God in the Bible can be watered down or compromised as so much religious paraphernalia. Rather, Holy Scripture calls on the true disciples of Jesus in word and deed (yes, in both WORD and DEED!) to be, if you will, lovingly intolerant of all false teaching, exposing error and then avoiding—separating from those who teach contrary to the doctrine we have learned (John 8:31-32, Rom. 16:17-18).

And that's what the Lutheran Reformation was all about, wasn't it? Almost 500 years ago, when Martin Luther was called before pope and emperor (before friend and foe, before church and state) and was asked to retract writings in which he had exposed the anti-scriptural religious paraphernalia of the Roman Church, he could not and would not recant! Luther had uncovered the truths of the gospel of God's unconditional grace and mercy for poor sinners—so long hidden and buried in all of Rome's unscriptural paraphernalia—and for the sake of a conscience bound to the clear Word of God, he would not back down. If we had time, we could expand on how Luther's true 16th-century heirs, both clergy and lay people, those who penned the confessions contained in the Book of Concord (1580), well understood what we have been talking about. For example, in their words: *“We willingly advance unity where nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, and poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ”* (Formula of Concord, Art. XI).

Similarly, may it ever be so that we confessional Lutheran Christians of the 21st century **“cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”**! As we review the history of the Church of the Lutheran Confession in this 50th anniversary year, may we give hearty thanks for the heritage implied by that name. And with God helping us, may we live up to that name so that individually and collectively we faithfully confess God's Word of truth before both friend and foe. Amen.

The First Article: Psalm 24:1-10

Frank Gantt

* In previous issues the *Journal* has already introduced the writer's sermon series on Luther's *Small Catechism*, beginning with sermons on the Ten Commandments and the Conclusion to the Commandments. The sermons on the Apostles' Creed were written and preached as a midweek Advent series, the first of which is offered below. The sermons on the Second and Third Articles will appear in the next issue.

To as many as received Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, He has given the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. Amen.

"I'm closer to God in the great outdoors than anywhere else." I can't tell you how often I have heard that statement. Usually it's an excuse offered to explain one's absence from church. For example, if someone decided to spend a Sunday morning fishing instead of coming to church, he might offer up those words to another who knows where he is going. "I'm closer to God in the great outdoors than anywhere else." The point being that because he's outside, enjoying the creation of God, it's better than being inside a stuffy, old building, listening to some guy bore him to sleep.

Is it really true? Does the great outdoors really bring one closer to God? It sounds reasonable at first, doesn't it? That is, when we spend time enjoying the things God has made and marveling at the wisdom of it all, don't we feel just a bit closer to God? Perhaps that is so. But feelings can be deceiving. Feelings don't make facts.

Today, as we begin our midweek Advent services using the three Articles of the Apostles' Creed as the basis for our meditations, we are going to examine exactly how we can be closer to our God, the Maker of heaven and earth. We just may be surprised to see where this examination will take us. Our text is Psalm 24:1-10:

The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face. Selah Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah

King David, writer of Psalm 24, was well acquainted with the wonders of God's creation. For as a lad he was accustomed to spending much of his time outdoors, working as a shepherd who tended to his father's sheep. This would naturally involve many days and nights outside, leading sheep up the hills in the daytime and counting the stars at night. Later on in his life David spent even more time outside, when King Saul hunted David all over the countryside, trying to kill him. David had to become familiar with the landscape to move his men from one area to another in order to escape. Surely David's experiences as shepherd, soldier, and even a fugitive had put him in the position of seeing and enjoying the wonders of God's creation.

It shows, too, in many of his psalms. Of the one hundred and fifty psalms contained in the book of Psalms, David was the writer of over one third of them. Of the fifty plus psalms of David recorded in the Scriptures, just about half of them make some reference to the creation of God. It would seem, then, that David not only spent a great deal of time outside; he learned valuable lessons from the creation he observed. So if it is true that being in the great outdoors brings one closer to God, then David must have been one of the closest to God in his day.

Indeed he was—the one God referred to as the “apple of His eye.” Now when David looked out at creation, he recognized that all of it belonged to the one true God, Jehovah, who had made it all. But listen again to the question that David asks after he acknowledges God’s creation: **“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?”** Essentially, the question David is asking is: How can one get closer to God? And his answer: **“He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.”** The only way to get closer to God is never to commit sin in action, in word, or even in thought. The only way to be closer to God is to trust in no one or nothing more than God. Is that a description of David? Hardly! Remember Bathsheba and her husband Uriah? Remember how David also sinned against God by conducting a census of Israel? David’s hands were not clean; neither was his heart pure. David had “lifted up his soul,” that is, trusted in that which is vain. If it is, as David says, that the clean-handed and pure-hearted individual receives blessings from God, where would that leave David? Where did it leave the people of Israel as they were seeking to be closer to Jehovah? Where does it leave us?

In comparison to what we know about David, we too are just as filthy and tainted by sin. We too have hands that are stained by sinful actions and hearts that are filled with impure thoughts: hatred, anger, lust, and pride. When you realize that one sin, no matter how insignificant it may seem, will prevent anyone from drawing close to God, then it must be clear that sinful people such as you and I have no chance of getting closer to God ever. Even if we were to spend all our waking hours contemplating the vast wisdom of God’s creation and all our evenings sleeping under the stars, still at the end of our lives we would be as far from God as the day we were born. Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher, studied the same creation and came to the amazing conclusion that there could only be one true God. Yet Socrates was no closer to Him than those who worshipped the man-made gods of Olympus. In spite of his accurate insight, he remained a sinful man, separated from his Creator God by the undeniable guilt of his own sin.

Then how may we draw closer to God? At this point some would say that you must begin by doing all kinds of good things to make up for your past sins. You must seek God by helping the poor. You must come to Him by being a loving husband/father or wife/mother. You can approach Him, they say, but only after you have kept the commandments. But this too is hopeless, for even if we strive our entire life to reach perfection, we will never achieve it. Again, we would only finish our life with a long list of sins that reveal just how far we have been from God. And those sins would surely stand as the just reason for condemnation—our own deserved punishment of eternal separation from Him in hell.

So is there no other way? It’s an urgent question for us. We can’t get closer to God by our contact with creation. We can’t get closer to God by anything that we do. How then will it happen? What is the route by which we can and do draw closer to Him? The answer is found in the last few verses of our text. Listen closely: **“Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory.”**

Did you catch it? The answer of how we get closer to God is for God Himself to come to us. It is in His coming, not ours, that we may be near Him. In this we see the amazing love of God at work because He, the Holy One, chose to live with those who were reprehensible in His sight. He chose to draw near to sinners and then to become “sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). This He did in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, which takes us, then, to that manger in Bethlehem those many years ago. The perfect God, who dwells in inaccessible light, takes on our flesh and blood, lives under the Law for us, and then dies in our place. Yes, the Word made flesh who dwelt among us truly is *Emmanuel*, God with us.

In speaking to the Athenians, the Apostle Paul pointed to the evidence of God’s creation as something God has left so that men might look for Him and find Him. There are many things one can learn about God from the creation He made: His power, His wisdom, even His goodness. But one thing

man never learns from creation is how he can get closer to God and avoid the rejection, the punishment that his conscience tells him he deserves. Go down to the Black Hills and see the power of God that bade the mountains rise. Is there any information about how you might be pleasing to God in those hills? Go to the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans and witness the continuous power that restrains the waves so that they can go no further. Will you find there any knowledge about how to cleanse your hands and purify your hearts so that God may accept you? Walk out your own back door and look at the grass, the trees, and the forms of wildlife that live there and are constantly provided for. Will you find from nature any provision for your life going on after death? The answer to these questions is a resounding “NO!” Creation doesn’t give one any ability to get closer to God. The true answer, however, was to be found in an animal’s feed trough and later on a criminal’s cross; the sure and only answer is Jesus Christ.

Of course, Jesus lived, died, rose again, and ascended almost two millennia ago. Does He not come to us now? Yes, He does. Jesus promises that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20). Jesus’ name is His Word. It is in the hearing of God’s Word that Jesus draws near to us. He likewise comes to us in baptism, clothing us with His own perfect robes of righteousness. And Jesus comes to us in His Holy Supper, feeding us with His very body and blood that were given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. We find that being in church is not a bad place after all if we want to be closer to God, because where Jesus Himself has promised to be, there we find full access to God, a closer relationship with God, and true communion with God. Only in Christ are your hands cleansed and your hearts purified in His sight.

So, by all means, go on and enjoy the creation which testifies to you of God’s wisdom, power, and goodness. But don’t count on that creation to bring you closer to your Creator. Rather, come to the place where He Himself comes to you—as the loving Father in His cleansing grace and forgiving mercy. That, of course, is always in and through His Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

רַחֲמִים—Synonymous with *Grace*?

Paul Naumann

Background

רַחֲמִים is a word occurring frequently in the Old Testament. It is most often used of God and is usually translated “kindness,” “mercy,” “faithful love,” or something similar. Over the course of many years’ work in Old Testament exegesis, I developed an interest in and curiosity about this word. So often did I seem to encounter it in the context of God’s loving (and undeserved) acts of mercy toward man that I began to wonder: Does רַחֲמִים mean “grace”? Might not this word as it is found in most Old Testament contexts really signify the precise concept that Lutherans understand as *grace*: *the undeserved love of God toward sinners*?

It is taken for granted among us that the concept of *grace* so defined comes to its ultimate fruition in God providing a Redeemer for sinful mankind. This is part and parcel of our understanding of the term. After years of study I feel similarly about the term רַחֲמִים. That is, if the Christian faith is valid and our eternal salvation is entirely dependant upon an unwarranted act of love on God’s part in sacrificing His Son for undeserving sinners, then *no* description of God’s love or kindness toward mankind can fail to include *grace*. And I mean here *grace* in exactly the terms that confessional Lutherans have always understood it. You can’t find Christ too often in the Old Testament, and for precisely the same reasons you can’t find grace too often either. That is the conclusion at which I have finally arrived, and that is the presupposition that I bring to this essay.

That this presupposition is not universally shared is a gross understatement. The Christian and Lutheran concept of grace—that sinners are eternally redeemed simply on the basis of God’s undeserved love toward us in Jesus Christ—can, of course, only be comprehended by Spirit-worked faith. The concept of grace, while perhaps not unknowable in a purely intellectual sense, is certainly *unacceptable* to unbelievers. Indeed, it is a concept that is downright offensive to many of them. This should not surprise us, for Paul reminds us that “*the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Cor.:14).

The concept of grace, accurately defined, is therefore a closed book to the unbeliever. It should come as no surprise, then, that the scholarship of the so-called higher critics, rising as it does from a presuppositional basis in unbelief, has no grasp whatever of the meaning of grace. Indeed, as we shall see in a moment, the most respected among the higher-critical authorities posit a definition of חֶסֶד that is actually based on the theological obverse of grace: good works. And after all, what else would we expect? The *opinio legis* is a powerful, ingrained voice in fallen mankind, and this is the presupposition that unbelieving scholars bring to all of their work, including their analysis of חֶסֶד. They believe that any favor a person receives from God (if such favor there be) must depend on the person’s own works. Without the Spirit they cannot believe otherwise. So it is natural that they try to fit even this wonderful word חֶסֶד into some tit-for-tat, contractual relationship between God and man, which, as we shall see, is exactly what they do.

The basics

The Hebrew word חֶסֶד occurs 255 times in 23 different forms in the Old Testament. Unusual among Hebrew vocables, it occurs almost exclusively as a noun. It is assumed to stem from a verbal root חֶסַד, but the verb occurs only in the *Hithpael*, and then only twice (2 Sam. 22:26 and Ps. 18:26), with the meaning “show kindness or mercy (to someone).” So in our study of this term we have mainly to deal with the noun.

According to the lexicons its definitions span a wide range of meanings. Brown-Driver-Briggs gives “*of man: goodness, kindness, mercy; of God: kindness, lovingkindness in condescending to the needs of his creatures.*” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* compiles the common glosses of the translations as “kindness, mercy, steadfast love, loving kindness, unflinching love, and occasionally loyalty.” That last gloss is revealing, as we shall discuss in a moment. Harkavy, an obscure but reliable gem of a lexicon of Jewish origin (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, c. 1914), has “kindness, goodness, favor, grace, mercy.”

Martin Luther was an astonishingly able Hebrew scholar, given the sorry state of Semitic studies in Europe as it emerged from the Dark Ages. He often shows insights into grammar and syntax, and his translations are surprisingly intuitive. It turns out that, in support of my thesis, Luther frequently translates חֶסֶד with the German word *Gnade*, “grace.” A few examples from Psalms and Proverbs are given below.

Proverbs 3:3: חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת אֱלֹהֵי עֶזְבֶּד קִשְׂרָם עַל־גְּרוֹתַי כְּחַבִּים
עַל־לִוּחַ לִבִּי

Luther: **Gnade** und Treue werden dich nicht lassen. Hänge sie an deinen Hals und schreibe sie auf die Tafel deines Herzens (LUO).¹

NKJ: Let not **mercy** and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

Psalms 103:4: הַגּוֹאֵל מִשַּׁחַת חַיִּיכִי הַמַּעֲטֵר כִּי חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים

Luther: Der dein Leben vom Verderben erlöst, der dich krönt mit **Gnade** und Barmherzigkeit,
NKJ: Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with **lovingkindness** and tender mercies.

Psalm 89:2 (3): כִּי־אָמַרְתִּי עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה שָׁמַיִם תִּכְוֶן אֱמוּנָתְךָ
בָּהֶם

Luther: Und sage also: Daß eine ewige **Gnade** wird aufgehen, und du wirst deine Wahrheit treulich halten im Himmel.

NKJ: For I have said, “**Mercy** shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.”

Few among men have understood the essence of God’s grace better than Martin Luther. The fact that he often equated חֶסֶד with *grace* argues powerfully for such a rendering in our own translations.

Controversy among higher critical scholars

Up until the early 20th century חֶסֶד was translated by the versions with words as mentioned above: *mercy, kindness, love*, and even *grace*. The Septuagint (LXX) usually renders with ἔλεος, that is, *mercy, pity, or compassion*. The Aramaic Targum and Syriac Peshitta both most frequently use a cognate of the Hebrew טוֹב, *good, goodness*. Gesenius (like Luther) in his Hebrew-German lexicon gave *Liebe, Gunst, Gnade* (“grace”).

All this was to change in 1927 when a German scholar named Nelson Glueck published his doctoral dissertation on the meaning of חֶסֶד (he was later to rise to the highest ranks of Hebrew scholarship; his work is respected to this day). Calling it a “watershed in the discussion,” Laird Harris sums up Glueck’s position on חֶסֶד in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*:

His views have been widely accepted. In brief, Glueck built on the growing idea that Israel was bound to its deity by covenants like the Hittite and other treaties. He held that God is pictured as dealing basically in this way with Israel. The Ten Commandments, etc. were stipulations of the covenant, Israel’s victories were rewards of covenant keeping, her apostasy was covenant violation and God’s *hesed* was not basically mercy, but loyalty to his covenant obligations, a loyalty which the Israelites should also show. He was followed substantially by W. F. Lofthouse (1933), N. H. Snaith (1944), H. W. Robinson (1946), Ugo Masing (1954), and many others.²

The extended discussion that follows in *Theological Wordbook* is very interesting.

The upshot of this view is to make of חֶסֶד nothing more than another product of man’s own good works and merit—in reality the opposite of what it should be, i.e., a function of the law rather than of the gospel.

This is not to say that Glueck’s work has gone unchallenged in scholarly circles in the decades since. Some vehement opposition has certainly come, most notably from H. J. Stoebe in 1951 and Katherine Sakenfeld in 1978. Both of them point out weaknesses in Glueck’s thesis and make strong arguments for a central meaning of חֶסֶד that is more in line with the traditional renderings of *mercy, love*, etc. Sakenfeld in particular points repeatedly to the *freedom* of God’s חֶסֶד in so many of the Old Testament passages; in other words, when the Lord is shown demonstrating חֶסֶד toward someone, He usually is under no obligation (covenantal or otherwise) to do so. Indeed, as may be seen from many of the passages given in the appendices, God’s חֶסֶד is often bestowed precisely on those who are least deserving of it—sinners, those who have transgressed God’s Law. What better definition of *grace* could there be?

Range of meaning: As an attribute of man

Many commentators note aptly that a beginning may be made in understanding the חסד God has toward people by looking at the חסד that *people* have toward people. Glueck argues that the word, when found in secular usage (between people), conveys a sense of fulfilling a covenant obligation, i.e., requiring fidelity to an oath or other human obligation.

Some passages that might seem to support this include, for example, 2 Samuel 16:17, Absalom's words to Hushai after the abdication of David: "So Absalom said to Hushai, 'Is this your *loyalty* to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?'"

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִשָׁלוֹם אֶל-חֹשִׁי זֶה חֶסֶדְךָ אֶת־רֵעֶךָ לָמָּה לֹא-הִלַּכְתָּ אֶת־רֵעֶךָ:

But even here חסד may more naturally be taken as *kindness*, the sort of affectionate regard that owes more to brotherly love than to any sense of duty.

A second example comes in Genesis 40:14: "But remember me when it is well with you, and please show *kindness* to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house."

כִּי אִם-זָכַרְתָּנִי אֶתְךָ כְּאִשֶׁר יִיטֵב לְךָ וְעָשִׂיתָ-נָּא עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְהִזְכַּרְתָּנִי אֶל-פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵאתָנִי מִן-הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה:

This passage, again, is seen by Glueck as indicating a tit-for-tat deal between Joseph and Pharaoh's butler. But could not this too be a simple plea for mercy? The butler, after all, entered into no covenant with Joseph; he made no deals or promises. He was free to forget Joseph (which, in fact, he promptly did).

What about the end of Psalm 62? We read verse 12: "Also to You, O Lord, belongs *mercy*; for You render to each one according to his work."

וְלִךְ-אֲדֹנָי חֶסֶד כִּי-אַתָּה תִשְׁלַם לְאִישׁ כְּמַעֲשָׂהוּ:

A few passages like this seem to tie חסד to covenant fulfillment and the works of the Law. Within a Messianic Christian context, however, even this passage may be seen as no more endorsing a work-righteous agreement with God than Christ does in Matthew 25 (v. 40: "*Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren. . .*"). In Matthew 25, as frequently elsewhere in Scripture, good works are merely the evidence of faith in the hearts of those *who have already been saved by grace*.

One more example of חסד as an attribute of man is found in Proverbs 19:22: "What is desired in a man is *kindness*, and a poor man is better than a liar."

תְּאֵוֹת אָדָם חֶסֶדוֹ וְטוֹב־רֵשׁ מֵאִישׁ כָּזָב:

Here חסד is predicated of man in a context that nearly precludes Glueck's definition of "loyalty to an oath." After all, which is more to be admired as a quality of a man: that he is loyal to an oath, or that he shows a spirit of mercy and kindness? Which do you admire more in your acquaintances?

Range of meaning: As an attribute of God

Briefly, we consider a few examples of the various ways חסד is used when it is predicated of God. חסד can mean *kindness* or *lovingkindness*:

Psalm 144:2 חֲסִדִי וּמְצוּדָתִי מִשְׁגָּבִי וּמִפְלִטִי לִי מִגְּנִי וְבוֹ חֲסִיתִי הַרְוֵה עַמִּי תַחְתָּי:

My *lovingkindness* and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield and *the One* in whom I take refuge, who subdues my people under me.

Numbers 14:19 סְלַח-נָּא לְעֹוֹן הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּגֹדֶל חֲסִדְךָ וְכְאִשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתָּה לְעָם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד-הַנּוֹה:

"Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your *mercy*, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

Yes, it can refer to God's *kindness* in keeping faithfully to the covenant He has entered into with His people, as the following passages demonstrate. But this hardly proves Glueck's thesis. Just because God and His people were engaged in a covenant doesn't mean that the people *deserved* the great blessings God gave them by their keeping of the covenant (which they never did anyway). I believe that חסד still means *grace, undeserved love*, even in such passages as these:

Deuteronomy 7:9 וידעת כי יהוה אלהיך הוא האלהים האל הנאמן שמר הברית והחסד לאתביו ולשמרי (מצותו) [מצותיו] לאלף דור:

"Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and **mercy** for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments."

Deuteronomy 7:12 והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר יהוה אלהיך לך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבתך:

"Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers."

Glueck and others base their arguments on the few passages like these where חסד is mentioned in the same context with *covenant* or similar words. But as I hope to show in the appendices, the overwhelming usage of חסד appears to be in contexts that have little or nothing to do with covenants or obligation of any sort.

The parallels

Context, as we know, is everything in Biblical Hebrew. In contrast with New Testament Greek, Hebrew has a paucity of verbal and noun forms with which to nail down the meaning of a word. In the Old Testament much more depends on context.

On the other hand, Biblical Hebrew has a very handy feature that New Testament Greek does not have: structural parallelism. When exploring the spectrum of meanings a word may legitimately bear, it is often helpful to search the poetical books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) to discover which words are used in parallel construction with the word you wish to define. Very often the words found in parallel construction are not strictly synonymous (e.g., *mercy* is not exactly the same thing as *truth*), but the parallel members do help define one another, and each in some way informs the meaning of the other. This is a particularly apt way to approach חסד, since nearly half its occurrences appear in Psalms.

Some of the more common words to appear in poetic parallel with חסד are רחמים, *tender mercies, compassion*; אמת, *truth*; אמונה, *firmness, fidelity, steadfastness*; and ישועה, *salvation*. A revealing (if not comprehensive) catalog of passages in which these descriptive words are used as parallel members with חסד is given in Appendix B. The following are a few more familiar passages to provide an example of each.

A) An example of רחמים in parallel with חסד:

Psalm 51:1 חנני אלהים כחסדך כרחמיך מחה פשעי:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your **lovingkindness**; according to the multitude of Your **tender mercies**, blot out my transgressions."

רחמים is the very descriptive Hebrew term that derives from רחם, or *womb*. So in these passages the חסד of God is compared to the yearning love that a woman feels for the child of her womb.

B) An example of אמת in parallel with חסד:

כִּי גִבֹר עָלֵינוּ חֶסֶדְךָ וְאֱמֶת־יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּ־יָהּ: Psalm 117:2

For His **merciful kindness** is great toward us, and the **truth** of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!

One may ask why *mercy* and *truth* are found so frequently together as attributes of God. At first glance they seem mutually exclusive. The story is told of a woman who came to the court of Emperor Napoleon to beg for mercy on behalf of her imprisoned son. “This is his third offense,” said the ruler, “he doesn’t deserve mercy!” “If he deserved it,” the woman replied, “it wouldn’t be mercy.” Thus *mercy* and *truth* might seem to exclude one another by definition. Passages like this might even be viewed as supporting the thesis that the favor of God is dependant upon true faithfulness to a covenant—both on the part of God *and* man. But as we know, God’s truth (His justice) is not exclusive of mercy (His grace); rather, they are interwoven in His eternal saving will for man. In fact, God in His justice cannot fail to show grace to the repentant sinner, now that He Himself has provided a Lamb to take away the sins of the world.

C) An example of אֱמוּנָה in parallel with חֶסֶד:

Psalm 92:3 לְהַגִּיד בַּבֹּקֶר חֶסֶדְךָ וְאֱמוּנָתְךָ בְּלֵילוֹת:

To declare Your **lovingkindness** in the morning, and Your **faithfulness** every night.

D) Two examples of יְשׁוּעָה in parallel with חֶסֶד:

Psalm 13:5 (6) וְאֲנִי בַחֶסֶדְךָ בְּטַחְתִּי וְגַל לִבִּי בִישׁוּעַתְךָ אֲשִׁירָה:

But I have trusted in Your **mercy**; My heart shall rejoice in Your **salvation**.

Psalm 18:50 מִגִּדְיֵל יְשׁוּעוֹת מִלְכּוֹ וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְמַשִּׁיחוֹ לְדָוִד וּלְזֶרְעוֹ עַד־עוֹלָם:

Great **deliverance** He gives to His king, and shows **mercy** to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore.

Passages such as these not only give us helpful insights into the meaning of חֶסֶד; they also illustrate how intimately חֶסֶד is bound up in the concept of God’s deliverance and salvation. As we know, the concept of deliverance in the Old Testament finds its highest fulfillment in the promise of deliverance through the Messiah, the Lamb of God who was to come.

Conclusion

When asked whether a certain Old Testament passage was Messianic, Martin Luther was said to have replied, “You can’t find Christ too often in the Old Testament.” And indeed, we know that to be true, for Jesus Himself has said, “*These are they which testify of Me*” (John 5.39). If the Christian faith is valid, then the entirety of the Old Testament truly is about Jesus, and you can’t find Him there too often.

That is one reason why when translating חֶסֶד in those contexts that point to an attribute or action of God, the first word I try is *grace*. It works for me nearly every time. I’m only one clumsy Hebrew student, but I remain convinced. I believe that if you give even a cursory reading to the passages in Appendix A, you’ll agree as well: When the Lord is in view, חֶסֶד **means grace**.

Appendix A: How the Septuagint (LXX) renders חֶסֶד

Each translation below is New Kings James, with the gloss for חֶסֶד highlighted in both appendices. Use of quotation marks indicates some form of direct discourse as punctuated in NKJ. For the sake of space some lengthier passages are not quoted in full.

*** In 196 passages (202 occurrences) חֶסֶד is translated in the LXX with the noun ἔλεος, “pity, mercy, compassion.”**

Gen. 24:12 *Then he said, "O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show **kindness** to my master Abraham."*

Gen. 24:14 *". . . And by this I will know that You have shown **kindness** to my master."*

Gen. 24:49 *"Now if you will **deal kindly** and truly with my master, tell me. . . ."*

Gen. 39:21 *But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him **mercy**, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

Gen. 40:14 *"But remember me when it is well with you, and please show **kindness** to me; . . ."*

Exod. 20:6 *"But showing **mercy** to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."*

Num. 14:19 *"Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your **mercy**, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."*

Deut. 5:10 *"But showing **mercy** to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."*

Deut. 7:9 *". . . He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and **mercy** for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments."*

Deut. 7:12 *"Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the **mercy** which He swore to your fathers."*

Josh. 2:12 *". . . swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you **kindness**, that you also will show **kindness** to my father's house, . . ."*

Josh. 2:14 *". . . And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that we will **deal kindly** and truly with you."*

Judg. 1:24 *And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you **mercy**."*

Judg. 8:35 *Nor did they show **kindness** to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.*

Ruth 1:8 *And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD **deal kindly** with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.*

Ruth 2:20 *Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not forsaken His **kindness** to the living and the dead!"*

Ruth 3:10 *Then he said, "Blessed are you of the LORD, my daughter! For you have shown more **kindness** at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich."*

1 Sam. 15:6 *Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed **kindness** to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt."*

1 Sam. 20:8 *"Therefore you shall **deal kindly** with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. . . ."*

1 Sam. 20:14-15 *"And you shall not only show me the **kindness** of the LORD while I still live, that I may not die; but you shall not cut off your **kindness** from my house forever, no, not when the LORD has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."*

2 Sam. 2:5 *So David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead, and said to them, "You are blessed of the LORD, for you have shown this **kindness** to your lord, to Saul, and have buried him."*

2 Sam. 2:6 *"And now may the LORD show **kindness** and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness [טובה], because you have done this thing."*

2 Sam. 3:8 *Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, "Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show **loyalty** to the house of Saul . . . and have not delivered you into the hand of David; . . ."*

2 Sam. 7:15 *"But My **mercy** shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you."*

- 2 Sam. 9:1 *Now David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him **kindness** for Jonathan's sake?"*
- 2 Sam. 9:3 *Then the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the **kindness** of God?"*
- 2 Sam. 9:7 *So David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you **kindness** for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; . . ."*
- 2 Sam. 10:2 *Then David said, "I will show **kindness** to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed **kindness** to me."*
- 2 Sam. 15:20 *"In fact, you came only yesterday. Should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I go I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. **Mercy** and truth be with you."*
- 2 Sam. 16:17 *So Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your **loyalty** to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?"*
- 2 Sam. 22:51 *"He is the tower of salvation to His king, and shows **mercy** to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore."*
- 1 Kings 2:7 *"But show **kindness** to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother."*
- 1 Kings 3:6 *And Solomon said: "You have shown great **mercy** to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great **kindness** for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day."*
- 1 Kings 8:23 *And he said: "LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and **mercy** with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts."*
- 1 Kings 20:31 *Then his servants said to him, "Look now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are **merciful** kings [lit. kings of mercy]. . . ."*
- 1 Chron. 16:34 *"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His **mercy** endures forever."*
- 1 Chron. 16:41 . . . *to give thanks to the LORD, because His **mercy** endures forever.*
- 1 Chron. 17:13 *"I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My **mercy** away from him, as I took it from him who was before you."*
- 1 Chron. 19:2 *Then David said, "I will show **kindness** to Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father showed **kindness** to me."*
- 2 Chron. 1:8 *And Solomon said to God: "You have shown great **mercy** to David my father, and have made me king in his place."*
- 2 Chron. 5:13 . . . *praised the LORD, saying: "For He is good, for His **mercy** endures forever," . . .*
- 2 Chron. 6:14 *And he said: "LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven or on earth like You, who keep Your covenant and **mercy** with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts."*
- 2 Chron. 6:42 *"O LORD God, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed; remember the **mercies** of Your servant David."*
- 2 Chron. 7:3 . . . *they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying: "For He is good, for His **mercy** endures forever."*
- 2 Chron. 7:6 . . . *which King David had made to praise the LORD, saying, "For His **mercy** endures forever". . . .*
- 2 Chron. 20:21 *He appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the LORD, for His **mercy** endures forever."*
- 2 Chron. 24:22 *Thus Joash the king did not remember the **kindness** which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son; and as he died, he said, "The LORD look on it, and repay!"*

2 Chron. 32:32 *Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his **goodness**, indeed they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.*

Ezra 3:11 *And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, for His **mercy** endures forever toward Israel."*

Ezra 7:27-28 *"Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, and has extended **mercy** to me before the king and his counselors. . . ."*

Ezra 9:9 *"For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended **mercy** to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem."*

Neh. 1:5 *And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and **mercy** with those who love You and observe Your commandments."*

Neh. 9:32 *"Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and awesome God, who keeps covenant and **mercy**: Do not let all the trouble seem small before You that has come upon us. . . ."*

Neh. 13:14 *Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my **good deeds** that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!*

Neh. 13:22 . . . *Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your **mercy**!*

Job 6:14 *"To him who is afflicted, **kindness** should be shown by his friend, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty."*

Job 10:12 *"You have granted me life and **favor**, and Your care has preserved my spirit."*

Job 37:13 *"He causes it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for **mercy**."*

Ps. 5:7 *But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your **mercy**; in fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple.*

Ps. 6:4 *Return, O LORD, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your **mercies**' sake!*

Ps. 13:5 *But I have trusted in Your **mercy**; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.*

Ps. 17:7 *Show Your marvelous **lovingkindness** by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them.*

Ps. 18:50 *Great deliverance He gives to His king, and shows **mercy** to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore.*

Ps. 21:7 *For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the **mercy** of the Most High he shall not be moved.*

Ps. 23:6 *Surely goodness and **mercy** shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Ps. 25:6 *Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your **lovingkindnesses**, for they are from of old.*

Ps. 25:7 *Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your **mercy** remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O LORD.*

Ps. 25:10 *All the paths of the LORD are **mercy** and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.*

Ps. 26:3 *For Your **lovingkindness** is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth.*

Ps. 31:7 *I will be glad and rejoice in Your **mercy**, for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities.*

Ps. 31:16 *Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your **mercies**' sake.*

Ps. 31:21 *Blessed be the LORD, for He has shown me His marvelous **kindness** in a strong city!*

Ps. 32:10 *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the LORD, **mercy** shall surround him.*

Ps. 33:5 *He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the **goodness** of the LORD.*

Ps. 33:18 *Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His **mercy**.*

Ps. 33:22 *Let Your **mercy**, O LORD, be upon us, just as we hope in You.*

Ps. 36:5 *Your **mercy**, O LORD, is in the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.*

Ps. 36:7 *How precious is Your **lovingkindness**, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.*

Ps. 36:10 *Oh, continue Your **lovingkindness** to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart.*

Ps. 40:10 *I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your **lovingkindness** and Your truth from the great assembly.*

Ps. 40:11 *Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your **lovingkindness** and Your truth continually preserve me.*

Ps. 42:8 *The LORD will command His **lovingkindness** in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life.*

Ps. 48:9 *We have thought, O God, on Your **lovingkindness**, in the midst of Your temple.*

Ps. 51:1 *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your **lovingkindness**; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.*

Ps. 52:8 *But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the **mercy** of God forever and ever.*

Ps. 57:3 *He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. Selah God shall send forth His **mercy** and His truth.*

Ps. 57:10 *For Your **mercy** reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds.*

Ps. 59:10 *My God of **mercy** shall come to meet me; God shall let me see my desire on my enemies.*

Ps. 59:16 *But I will sing of Your power; yes, I will sing aloud of Your **mercy** in the morning; for You have been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble.*

Ps. 59:17 *To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises; for God is my defense, my God of **mercy**.*

Ps. 61:7 *He shall abide before God forever. Oh, prepare **mercy** and truth, which may preserve him!*

Ps. 62:12 *Also to You, O Lord, belongs **mercy**; for You render to each one according to his work.*

Ps. 63:3 *Because Your **lovingkindness** is better than life, my lips shall praise You.*

Ps. 66:20 *Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His **mercy** from me!*

Ps. 69:13 *But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, in the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your **mercy**, hear me in the truth of Your salvation.*

Ps. 69:16 *Hear me, O LORD, for Your **lovingkindness** is good; turn to me according to the multitude of Your tender mercies.*

Ps. 77:8 *Has His **mercy** ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore?*

Ps. 85:7 *Show us Your **mercy**, LORD, and grant us Your salvation.*

Ps. 85:10 ***Mercy** and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.*

Ps. 86:13 *For great is Your **mercy** toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*

Ps. 88:11 *Shall Your **lovingkindness** be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?*

Ps. 89:1 *I will sing of the **mercies** of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.*

Ps. 89:2 *For I have said, “**Mercy** shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.”*

Ps. 89:14 *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; **mercy** and truth go before Your face.*

Ps. 89:24 *“But My faithfulness and My **mercy** shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted.”*

Ps. 89:28 *“My **mercy** I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him.”*

Ps. 89:33 *“Nevertheless My **lovingkindness** I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail.”*

Ps. 89:49 *Lord, where are Your former **lovingkindnesses**, which You swore to David in Your truth?*

Ps. 90:14 *Oh, satisfy us early with Your **mercy**, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!*

Ps. 92:2 To declare Your **lovingkindness** in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night,
Ps. 94:18 If I say, "My foot slips," Your **mercy**, O LORD, will hold me up.
Ps. 98:3 He has remembered His **mercy** and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
Ps. 100:5 For the LORD is good; His **mercy** is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.
Ps. 101:1 I will sing of **mercy** and justice; to You, O LORD, I will sing praises.
Ps. 103:4 Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with **lovingkindness** and tender mercies,
Ps. 103:11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His **mercy** toward those who fear Him.
Ps. 103:17 But the **mercy** of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children.
Ps. 106:1 Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His **mercy** endures forever.
Ps. 106:7 Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; they did not remember the multitude of Your **mercies**, but rebelled by the sea—the Red Sea.
Ps. 106:45 And for their sake He remembered His covenant, and relented according to the multitude of His **mercies**.
Ps. 107:1 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His **mercy** endures forever.
Ps. 107:8 Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His **goodness**, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!
Ps. 107:15, 21, and 31 (same as Ps. 107:8) Oh, that men . . . to the LORD for His **goodness**, . . . the children of men!
Ps. 107:43 Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the **lovingkindness** of the LORD.
Ps. 108:4 For Your **mercy** is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches to the clouds.
Ps. 109:16 Because he did not remember to show **mercy**, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart.
Ps. 109:21 But You, O GOD the Lord, deal with me for Your name's sake; because Your **mercy** is good, deliver me.
Ps. 109:26 Help me, O LORD my God! Oh, save me according to Your **mercy**.
Ps. 115:1 Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your **mercy**, because of Your truth.
Ps. 118:1 and 118:29 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His **mercy** endures forever.
Ps. 118:2 Let Israel now say, "His **mercy** endures forever."
Ps. 118:3 Let the house of Aaron now say, "His **mercy** endures forever."
Ps. 118:4 Let those who fear the LORD now say, "His **mercy** endures forever."
Ps. 119:41 Let Your **mercies** come also to me, O LORD—Your salvation according to Your word.
Ps. 119:64 The earth, O LORD, is full of Your **mercy**; teach me Your statutes.
Ps. 119:76 Let, I pray, Your **merciful kindness** be for my comfort, according to Your word to Your servant.
Ps. 119:88 Revive me according to Your **lovingkindness**, so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.
Ps. 119:124 Deal with Your servant according to Your **mercy**, and teach me Your statutes.
Ps. 119:159 Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Your **lovingkindness**.
Ps. 130:7 O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is **mercy**, and with Him is abundant redemption.
Ps. 136:1 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His **mercy** endures forever.
Ps. 136:2 Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His **mercy** endures forever.
Ps. 136:3 Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His **mercy** endures forever.

Ps. 136:4-5 *To Him who alone does great wonders, for His **mercy** endures forever; to Him who by wisdom made the heavens, for His **mercy** endures forever. . . .*

See also Psalm 136:6-26.³

Ps. 138:2 *I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your **lovingkindness** and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name.*

Ps. 138:8 *The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; Your **mercy**, O LORD, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands.*

Ps. 141:5 *Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a **kindness**. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked.*

Ps. 143:8 *Cause me to hear Your **lovingkindness** in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You.*

Ps. 143:12 *In Your **mercy** cut off my enemies, and destroy all those who afflict my soul; for I am Your servant.*

Ps. 144:2 *My **lovingkindness** and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield and the One in whom I take refuge, who subdues my people under me.*

Ps. 147:11 *The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His **mercy**.*

Prov. 14:22 *Do they not go astray who devise evil? But **mercy** and truth belong to those who devise good.*

Isa. 16:5 *"In **mercy** the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness."*

Isa. 54:8 *"With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting **kindness** I will have mercy on you," says the LORD, your Redeemer.*

Isa. 63:7 *I will mention the **lovingkindnesses** of the LORD and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, according to the multitude of His **lovingkindnesses**.⁴*

Jer. 2:2 *"Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, the **kindness** of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown."'*

Jer. 9:24 *"But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising **lovingkindness**, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. for in these I delight," says the LORD.*

Jer. 32:18 *"You show **lovingkindness** to thousands, and repay the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them—the Great, the Mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts."*

Jer. 33:11 *"the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: "Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His **mercy** endures forever. . . ."*

Lam. 3:32 *Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His **mercies**.*

Dan. 9:4 *And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and **mercy** with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments. . . ."*

Hos. 2:19 *"I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in **lovingkindness** and mercy."*

Hos. 4:1 *Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or **mercy** or knowledge of God in the land."*

Hos. 6:4 *"O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your **faithfulness** is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away."*

Hos. 6:6 *"For I desire **mercy** and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."*

Hos. 12:6 *So you, by the help of your God, return; observe **mercy** and justice, and wait on your God continually.*

Jonah 2:8 *“Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own **Mercy**.”*

Mic. 6:8 *He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love **mercy**, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Mic. 7:18 *Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in **mercy**.*

Mic. 7:20 *You will give truth to Jacob and **mercy** to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.*

Zech. 7:9 *Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Execute true justice, show **mercy** and compassion everyone to his brother.”*

*** In 9 passages** רַחֲמִים is translated with the noun δικαιοσύνη, “**righteousness, justice,**” by the LXX.

Gen. 19:19 *“Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your **mercy** which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die.”*

Gen. 20:13 *“And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This is your **kindness** that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’”*

Gen. 21:23 *“Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the **kindness** that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt.”*

Gen. 24:27 *And he said, “Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His **mercy** and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren.”*

Gen. 32:10 *“I am not worthy of the least of all the **mercies** and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.”*

Exod. 15:13 *“You in Your **mercy** have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation.”*

Exod. 34:7 *“Keeping **mercy** for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”*

Prov. 20:28 **Mercy** and truth preserve the king, and by **lovingkindness** (δικαιοσύνη) he upholds his throne.

Isa. 63:7 *I will mention the **lovingkindnesses** of the LORD and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, . . . which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, according to the multitude of His **lovingkindnesses** (δικαιοσύνη).*

*** In 10 passages** רַב־חַסְדִּים is translated with the Greek adjective πολυέλεος, “**very merciful, abounding in love,**” by the LXX.

Exod. 34:6 *And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and **abounding in goodness** and truth.”*

Num. 14:18 *“The LORD is longsuffering and **abundant in mercy**, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty. . . .”*

Neh. 9:17 *They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, **abundant in kindness**, and did not forsake them.*

Ps. 86:5 *For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and **abundant in mercy** to all those who call upon You.*

Ps. 86:15 *But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and **abundant in mercy** and truth.*

Ps. 103:8 *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and **abounding in mercy**.*

Ps. 145:8 *The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and **great in mercy**.*

Joel 2:13 *So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of **great kindness**; and He relents from doing harm.*

Jon. 4:2 *So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and **abundant in lovingkindness**, One who relents from doing harm."*

*** In 6 passages** חַסֵּד is translated with the noun ἐλεημοσύνη, "**pity, mercy, charity,**" by the LXX.

Gen. 47:29 *He called his son Joseph and said to him, "Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and **deal kindly** and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt."*

Prov. 3:3 *Let not **mercy** and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.*

Prov. 16:6 *In **mercy** and truth atonement is provided for iniquity; and by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil.*

Prov. 19:22 *What is desired in a man is **kindness**, and a poor man is better than a liar.*

Prov. 20:28 ***Mercy** (ἐλεημοσύνη) and truth preserve the king, and by **lovingkindness** he upholds his throne.*

Prov. 21:21 *He who follows righteousness and **mercy** finds life, righteousness, and honor.*

Appendix B: Words occurring in parallel constructions with חַסֵּד

In 4 passages חַסֵּד occurs in parallel with the noun יְשׁוּעָה (**salvation**) in the Hebrew of BHS.

2 Sam. 22:51 *"He is the tower of salvation to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore."*

Ps. 13:5 *But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.*

Ps. 18:50 *Great deliverance He gives to His king, and shows mercy to His anointed, to David and his descendants forevermore.*

Ps. 98:3 *He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.*

In 8 passages חַסֵּד occurs in parallel with the noun רַחֲמִים (**tender mercy, compassion**) in the Hebrew of BHS.

Ps. 40:11 *Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me.*

Ps. 51:1 *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.*

Ps. 69:16 *Hear me, O LORD, for Your lovingkindness is good; turn to me according to the multitude of Your tender mercies.*

Ps. 103:4 *Who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies. . . .*

Isa. 63:7 *I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies (כְּרַחֲמָיו), according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.*

Jer. 16:5 *For thus says the LORD: “Do not enter the house of mourning, nor go to lament or bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people,” says the LORD, “lovingkindness and mercies.”*

Dan. 1:9 *Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.*

Hos. 2:19 *“I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy.”*

In 6 passages רַחֲמָיו occurs in parallel with the noun אֱמֶת (*truth*) in the Hebrew of BHS.

Ps. 26:3 *For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth.*

Ps. 57:10 *For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds.*

Ps. 108:4 *For Your mercy is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches to the clouds.*

Ps. 117:2 *For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the LORD endures forever. . . .*

Isa. 16:5 *“In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.”*

Mic. 7:20 *You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.*

In 8 passages אֱמוּנָה occurs in parallel with the noun אֱמוּנָה (*firmness, fidelity, steadfastness*) in the Hebrew of BHS.

Ps. 36:5 *Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.*

Ps. 88:11 *Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?*

Ps. 89:1 *I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.*

Ps. 89:2 *For I have said, “Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.”*

Ps. 89:24 *“But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted.”*

Ps. 89:33 *Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail.*

Ps. 92:2 *To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night,*

Ps. 100:5 *For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.*

Endnotes

¹ L^UO denotes the 1912 edition of *Luther Bibel*, from which the German quotations are taken.

² Harris, R. Laird. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 305.

³ Though not quoted in Appendix A, the remaining verses of Psalm 136 are much like verses 4 and 5, having the repeated refrain: “For His mercy endures forever.” In this Psalm רַחֲמָיו is used 26 times, with the LXX rendering each as ἔλεος.

⁴ Though אֱמוּנָה also occurs at the end of this verse, the LXX only rendered the first occurrence with ἔλεος. The LXX translation of the last occurrence is noted at the end of the next section in Appendix A.

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Were Circumcision and the Passover Old Testament Sacraments?

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* Initially written and presented as a pastoral conference essay, the following is an attempt not only to answer the question stated in the title above, but especially to delineate the traditionally held view of the Lutheran fathers (including Pieper and Hoenecke) and then evaluate the stated position in the light of Scripture. The *Journal* offers an abridged version of the writer's essay.

Francis Pieper and Adolf Hoenecke

If we could equate the writings of Francis Pieper and Adolf Hoenecke with the Word of God, we could answer the question of our title with a one-word answer "Yes." For Pieper, the venerable Dr. of Divinity in the Missouri Synod, says in Volume III of *Christian Dogmatics*:

Also circumcision and the Passover were, ever since their institution, means of grace for the period of the Old Testament. Regarding circumcision we read in Gen. 17:7: "**I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee,**" that is, to be your gracious God, assuring you of the remission of sins by this rite of circumcision. Therefore Paul, in Rom. 4:11, calls circumcision "**a seal of the righteousness of the faith.**"¹

Pieper continues:

And as concerns the Passover, Ex. 12:21 ff. shows that the Children of Israel were exempted from the punitive judgment of God not because they were Jews, but because of the blood of the paschal

Exod. 12:23-24: **“For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons forever.”** On this account Luther says: “It is not true that the Sacraments of the New Testament differ from the Sacraments of the Old Testament as to their signification” [namely, as God-appointed signs of the *grace* of God]. . . . “Both our and the fathers’ signs or Sacraments have a word of promise attached which calls for faith and can be fulfilled by no other work. Therefore they are signs or Sacraments of justification.” (*Opp. v. a. V*, 62.) Both through the Word about the coming Messiah and through circumcision and the Passover, the Sacraments of the Old Testament, the remission of sins was given and, by the believers, appropriated.²

Adolf Hoenecke of the Wisconsin Synod taught the same thing in *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, pages 74-80, where he began with Point 11: “*The sacraments of the Old Testament are essentially equivalent to those of the New Testament.*” Then comes the following:

Our dogmatists copiously discuss the question of whether the sacraments of the Old Testament (circumcision and the Passover) are essentially equivalent to those of the New Testament, i.e., whether they are efficacious means of grace and sure seals of grace. We present Gerhard’s thorough explanation in abbreviated form.³

As clearly indicated in the above quotations, Pieper and Hoenecke were not the first to name circumcision and the Passover as Old Testament sacraments. Pieper quoted Luther, and Hoenecke quoted Gerhard. In his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, part II, pages 45-57, Martin Chemnitz likewise spoke often of the sacraments of the Old Testament and definitely referred to circumcision as one of them, although there is no specific mention of Passover.

Theologians among the Reformed have also spoken of circumcision and the Passover as Old Testament sacraments. Louis Berkhof, for example, says in *Systematic Theology*: “During the old dispensation there were two sacraments, namely, circumcision and passover.”⁴

A closer examination

What we have to do, then, is put these writings of our fathers to the test. Is it right to consider circumcision and Passover as sacraments of the Old Testament? If so, were these two the only sacraments of the Old Testament?

First of all, we must agree on the definition of sacrament that will be used. For the purpose of this paper I am assuming that our definition of sacrament is to be based on what Baptism and the Lord’s Supper have in common, fully realizing that *sacrament* is not a Bible term and that there is no term in the New Testament that links Baptism and the Lord’s Supper with each other, except for the phrase “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38; Matt. 26:28). In line with this same understanding, Helmut Thielicke says:

If we want to keep the word sacrament, we can do so only on two conditions. First, it cannot play the part of a master concept from which our sacramental understanding of baptism and the Lord’s Supper is to be deduced. Taking this course exposes us to both of the ideologizings mentioned and lets the dubious genealogy of the term sacrament affect our view of baptism and the Supper. What a sacrament is can only be known inductively from a formulation of the features common to baptism and the Supper.⁵

With this understanding in view the questions we want to examine are these: Were circumcision and the Passover in the Old Testament instituted by Christ? Did they convey the forgiveness of sins and thereby strengthen faith in Christ? And did they convey forgiveness by means of a visible earthly element or elements prescribed by Christ?

Genesis 17 tells us that circumcision was instituted by the LORD God. Although the term “Angel” or “Messenger of the LORD” is not used in Genesis 17 as it is in other Genesis chapters when God

appeared to Abraham, it could very well be that the pre-incarnate Christ, who is the LORD God, was the one who instituted circumcision in Genesis 17. Likewise, Exodus 12 states plainly that the LORD God instituted the Passover celebration. In other chapters in Exodus the Angel of the LORD appeared to Moses, and so also here it could well be that it was the pre-incarnate Christ who instituted the Passover. In any case, neither circumcision nor the Passover were inventions of man; they were not ideas that Abraham or his descendants devised. They were institutions of God, just like Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Circumcision and the forgiveness of sins

The second question above is the critical one. Did circumcision and the Passover convey the forgiveness of sins and thereby strengthen the faith of God's Old Testament people in the Messiah who was to come? In neither case do we have a specific wording that says "for the remission of sins." But in the case of circumcision we do have God saying: **"I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you"** (Gen. 17:7). Then God added: **"This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. . . . My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant"** (Gen. 17:10-11, 13-14).

God's covenant with Abraham was first made as recorded in Genesis 12. The covenant included the promise of the Savior to come: **"And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"** (Gen. 12:3). Whenever God's covenant with Abraham is mentioned after that time, we should never forget that it included the promise of the Savior. In fact, the promise of the Savior was the heart of the covenant, separating Abraham and his family from all other nations and peoples. Circumcision was a sign of this covenant. Through circumcision God made Abraham's descendants members of His people. Those who refused circumcision could not be God's people, for they were rejecting His covenant by rejecting the sign of His covenant. By this rejection they were also rejecting the God of grace who promised them the Savior.

Valid inferences apply that lead to a definitive conclusion. We know that Abraham and his descendants, like all people, were born in sin and were not the people of God by nature. And we know from the Genesis texts above that God through circumcision made them His children and His people, which implies that God was forgiving their sins, for only through forgiveness of sins can sinners ever become His people (cf. Jer. 31:33-34). Therefore it must be clear that God through circumcision was conveying the forgiveness of sins to them.

It is also clear that this forgiveness of sins was linked to the visible action of circumcision. A refusal of circumcision meant that there would be no forgiveness of sins for the person who refused, since he would be cutting himself off from the people of God. How necessary circumcision was is also indicated by God's demand that Moses circumcise his son. **"And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, 'Surely you are a husband of blood to me!' So He let him go. Then she said, 'You are a husband of blood!'—because of the circumcision"** (Exod. 4:24-26).

In Romans 4 Paul rightly argues that Abraham was certainly justified by faith in the promise of the Savior even before he was circumcised. This does not negate the value of circumcision as an Old Testament sacrament. It only indicates that, just as in the New Testament, God's grace comes in more than one way. To Abraham at first it came in the form of the Word of promise, which Abraham then

believed, and thus he received the benefit of the promise: the forgiveness of sins through the Son who was to come from his family. To that original promise God then added circumcision as a sign of the same promise. Paul says: **“He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised. . .”** (Rom. 4:11). God arranged things as He did so that Abraham could be a model of faith for Gentiles as well as for Jews.

In this way circumcision was a preview of Baptism. For just as circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of Christ, to be received by faith, so also Baptism seals the gift of righteousness, the forgiveness of sins, that Christ won for us by His suffering and death on the cross, to be received by faith.

Passover and the forgiveness of sins

Now let us move on to consider whether also the Passover, as instituted by the LORD, conveyed the forgiveness of sins, and whether this forgiveness was linked to an earthly visible element. The celebration of the Passover involved the killing of a lamb or a kid, the smearing of the blood of the animal on the doorposts and lintel, the roasting of the animal according to the instructions given, and finally the eating of the flesh of that animal together with the eating of unleavened bread and bitter herbs. After giving them instructions on these points, God said: **“For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt”** (Exod. 12:12-13).

What God did on that first Passover was to be celebrated every year after that: **“. . . You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance”** (Exod. 12:14).

By this ceremony God certainly wanted to teach His people that they were by nature no better than the Egyptians. The Egyptians deserved to be punished by the Lord because of their sins, especially because of their unbelief and rebellion and their refusal to let the children of Israel go free. But the Israelites also deserved to be punished because they also were far from living up to their calling as the people of God. The Israelites were saved from punishment (the death of their firstborn) by the blood of a lamb. If they had no lamb's or kid's blood on their doors, God would not pass over them, but would destroy the firstborn in their homes, just as He destroyed the firstborn among the Egyptians.

So did this blood convey the forgiveness of sins? Without the shedding of the animal blood they would be treated just like the Egyptians. It is clear that the blood of the lamb that they smeared conveyed forgiveness of sins, for without it they would have been doomed to punishment. By then partaking of the flesh of the lamb at God's direction, they were expressing their faith in God's provision for their salvation. They were partaking of the flesh of the very animal that had saved them by its blood, and all of this according to God's command.

Did God intend by this Passover to strengthen their faith in the coming Savior? Certainly they were to learn that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sins (Heb. 9:22). All of the animal sacrifices taught this lesson, and the Passover celebration likewise. They could learn that they were sinners who needed to be redeemed by the death of a Victim. From the promise given first to Adam and then to Noah and then to Abraham, they could learn that this Victim was to be the Savior who was to come from Abraham's family, the Woman's Seed who would vanquish Satan only by having His own heel bruised.

The only two Old Testament sacraments?

Now to the question of whether circumcision and Passover were the only Old Testament sacraments. In his lecture on “The Means of Grace in the Old Testament,” Steven Briel shows that God in Old Testament times chose to attach His promise to various signs: the tree of life, the rainbow after the flood, the bronze serpent in the wilderness, the Jordan River as a cure for Naaman’s leprosy. He says: “God generally not only spoke a promise but joined His Word to some visible sign or element to confirm that promise or Word.”⁶ Nevertheless, circumcision and the Passover were special because they involved actions that had to be carried out from generation to generation (circumcision) and repeated year after year (Passover) until the coming of the Savior, to whom they pointed. But perhaps the same could be said about the entire Old Testament sacrificial system, which also had to be repeated over and over.

Therefore I do not think a strong case can be made for saying that circumcision and the Passover were the only Old Testament sacraments. Nor do I think it important to try to determine how many Old Testament sacraments there were. The Old Testament has the character of the shadow of things to come, and so there are many indications of God’s grace tied to various kinds of laws and ceremonies. Undoubtedly, circumcision and Passover are given special consideration because circumcision is a preview of Baptism and Passover is a preview of the Lord’s Supper. Baptism is, in fact, called “**the circumcision of Christ**” in Colossians 2:11-12. And it is obvious from our Lord’s institution of the Lord’s Supper at His last Passover that there is a definite relationship between the eating of the Passover lamb and the partaking of the body and blood of the Lamb of God in the Lord’s Supper. We can understand, then, why there is an emphasis on circumcision and the Passover as Old Testament sacraments.

Adolf Hoenecke’s presentation of Gerhard

We conclude this discussion with Hoenecke’s presentation of Johann Gerhard that is contained in *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, pages 75-80. Only in recent years have the last two volumes of Hoenecke’s *Dogmatics* become available in translation. I suspect, then, that many of our readers have not yet read what is offered below.

Circumcision

Circumcision is both covenant and covenant sign (Ge 17:4; Ac 7:8; Ro 4:11). It has a spiritual effect and mediates grace. The distinction between circumcision of the flesh and circumcision of the heart does not deny that (Ro 2:28; Eph 2:11), because the distinction does not say that circumcision received in faith was without effect. It merely rebukes the fleshly Israel, which boasted about God without faith only because of the external sign. The sacramental Word that makes circumcision a sacrament is Genesis 17:7-11. The purpose and effect of the sacrament are that it is to be (1) a means of grace for being taken up into the covenant and receiving the righteousness of God, and (2) a seal of the received righteousness of faith. Circumcision is a type of Baptism.

The Passover

The Passover lamb is a type of the Lord’s Supper. We must keep in mind that the slaughtered lamb whose blood was smeared on the doorposts and lintel is a type of Christ as the true Passover lamb. But the eaten lamb is the Old Testament sacrament and a type of the Lord’s Supper.

The original word for Passover is to be derived from the verb פָּסַח, “pass over, go past, spare.” Recent unbelieving scholars have attempted to derive it in a completely different way than Scripture. They suggest the passing of the people through the Red Sea, the sun’s passing through the constellation

Aries, or the passing of winter into summer, and so on. Recent believing scholars understand it as the old dogmatists did, according to Exodus 12:13, 24, 27, as derived from פָּסַח, “pass over” in the sense of “spare.”

The external element is the slaughtered lamb. The purpose is to be a sacrament of remembrance of the past, but also of prefiguration of the future, of the New Testament Passover lamb (Jn 19:36; 1 Co 5:7; 1 Pe 1:19).

Although the Passover points to Christ, it was nevertheless a sacramental meal, not a sacrifice in the strict sense. The use of the word for “sacrifice” in Exodus 12:27 and the reference to Christ as the sacrificed Passover lamb in 1 Corinthians 5:7 seemingly imply otherwise. But the Passover is only called a sacrifice on account of its relationship to Christ. The Passover itself lacks all the requirements of a real sacrifice. Sacrifices are only presented by the priests, not by the fathers of the household (Ex 12:3). Sacrifices take place at the altar, but the Passover lamb is slaughtered in the house. Besides the Passover lamb, there were also real Passover sacrifices that took place at the altar but had nothing at all to do with the Passover lamb. Finally, a sacrifice is presented totally or at least in part to God, but the Passover lamb is eaten by the family according to the explicitly strict command of God (Ex 12:10; Nu 9: 12,13). Nothing from it is presented to God.

It is understandable why our dogmatists so vehemently refute from Scripture the view of the Passover as a sacrifice in the strict sense. The papists emphatically base the sacrifice of the Mass on the Passover as sacrifice.

Comparison of Old and New Testament sacraments

The Lutheran, scriptural teaching of the relationship between the Old and New Testament sacraments is given in the thesis.⁷ It maintains the essential equality of both. As Chemnitz explains, God has revealed his will and the mystery of redemption at all times, and from the beginning he has sealed his Word also through external signs. In the Old Testament he already gave sacraments as means of grace that appropriate and seal it (Ro 4:11). It is the same God in the Old and New Testaments, the same mediator, the same grace, the same righteousness, and the same redemption. This applies also in regard to the essence of the sacraments in the Old and New Testaments. But the outward signs of the sacraments do not remain the same. It was God’s will to replace the signs of the Old Testament sacraments with others in the New Testament sacraments, in keeping with his ever-brightening revelation of grace. Gerhard teaches similarly about the Old and New Testament sacraments, showing in what respects they are the same and in what they are different:

1. The Lutheran church recognizes an outward difference between the Old and New Testament sacraments.
2. But it states the same principal purpose, the mediation of grace, although we should recognize with Chemnitz that there is a difference in the mode of the mediation of grace. Just as there is fuller revelation in the New Testament, the New Testament sacraments impart grace more richly, more fully, and more clearly.
3. Beside the true signs in the Old Testament sacraments, there are also general holy signs and acts in the Old Testament. These are to be distinguished in principle from the true signs.

Like Chemnitz, Gerhard also establishes the basis for the efficacy of the grace of the Old Testament sacraments:

1. The divine gospel promises of grace apply to the Old Testament. That is proved by Genesis 3:15, Acts 15:11, and Romans 3:30. The old proverb applies: Before there was a Christ, there was a benefit in Christ (*Christus profuit, antequam fuit*). The Old Testament fathers believed in the coming and suffering of Christ in the future (Lk 10:23,24), but they enjoyed grace and blessing from the coming and suffering of Christ in the present. Because the gospel promises of grace had

the same validity for the Old Testament, the sacramental signs attached to the Word in the Old Testament had the same effect.

2. Circumcision has a special promise of grace bound to it (Ge 17:7): “to be your God.” That is undoubtedly a promise through which God underscores and seals reception into the covenant of grace. When we compare it to Jeremiah 31:33,34, it follows that the promise “to be your God” means as much as saying, “I want to forgive your sins and accept you as children.”
3. The Passover lamb was a prefigurement of Christ as the Easter lamb (Jn 1:29). In the Lord’s Supper, which has taken the place of the Passover lamb, the faith of those who eat it as believers is strengthened. In the same way, the Passover was also given to strengthen the faith of the believers, in this case believers in the coming Messiah.

Gerhard summarizes the similarity:

No one could easily deny that there is some agreement between the sacraments of both testaments, since they agree not only (1) in name, but also (2) in the level of classification closest to species, (3) in the principal efficient cause, (4) in the same kind of final cause (the offer, application, and seal of grace), (5) in the same kind of material and essence (that is, in so far as every sacrament in the proper sense of the term is a sacred and solemn act, divinely instituted, which deals with a definite object fixed by a special word of institution and promise), and (6) in use, for faith is required for both to be salutary.

The difference between Old and New Testament sacraments, according to Gerhard, is this:

1. The Old Testament sacraments are prophetic; the New Testament ones are fulfillment. The former are shadows; the latter are the thing itself.
2. The substance of the Old Testament sacraments is different from that of the New Testament sacraments. For example, in the Passover, the real substance is the figure and shadow of Christ, not his body and blood. The heavenly material, the God-man Christ, is lacking in the Old Testament sacrament.

Antithesis

The scriptural Lutheran teaching is opposed by all other churches, but in various ways. The papists recognize the Old Testament sacraments, but they deny their objective efficacy and let them be no more than types of the New Testament sacraments. Such is the teaching of the Council of Trent and of Bellarmine. Among the scholastics we find three views:

1. According to Hugo of St. Cher (Hugo de Sancto Caro, d. 1263), the Old Testament sacraments impart grace, but not as abundantly and directly as in the sacraments of the New Testament.
2. According to Peter Lombard, the Old Testament sacraments do not really impart grace either by the active work (*ex opere operante*) or by the performed rite (*ex opere operato*); God instituted them actually only as a burden and servile work (*onus et servitutem*) in the Old Testament.
3. According to Thomas Aquinas and Alexander of Hales, the Old Testament sacraments impart grace *only* by the active work (*ex opere operante*).

Bellarmino has the same view as Thomas and Alexander. The Old Testament sacraments are actions done in obedience to the law, and that obedience is viewed as a *virtue* that has been demonstrated precisely through the use of the sacrament, the active work (*ex opere operante*). On that basis grace is imparted to the recipient.⁸

As far as the other churches are concerned, they are either completely indifferent to the question of Old Testament sacraments (Socinians, Arminians, Anabaptists) or, if they recognize in any way the sacramental worth of circumcision and of the Passover lamb, this recognition reduces itself to nothing because of their false basic view of the efficacy of the sacraments in general (Calvinists). Calvin

says, “The old sacraments had the same goal our present sacraments do, namely, that they might direct people to Christ . . . or rather that they might represent him as images.” Already when he says that, the general emptying of the sacraments is indicated. It therefore does not say much when he calls the scholastics guilty of impiety for teaching that the Old Testament sacraments only gave a shadowy portrayal of grace (*gratiam adumbrarent*), but that the New Testament sacraments confer a present grace.

Endnotes

¹ Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 3. Trans. W. Albrecht (Concordia: St. Louis, 1953) 214. The highlighting of the Scripture passages has been added.

² Pieper 214-215; highlighting added.

³ Hoenecke, Adolf. *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Vol. 4. Trans. J. Friedrich, P. Prange, B. Tackmier (Northwestern: Milwaukee, 1999) 74-75. Gerhard’s “explanation in abbreviated form,” with the source given as *Loci*, Vol. VIII, loc. XIX *de sacramentis*, p. 260, is quoted at the end of this essay.

⁴ Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, 4th Ed. 1941 (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1976) 620.

⁵ Thielicke, Helmut. *The Evangelical Faith*, Vol. 3. Trans. G. W. Bromiley (Smyth & Helwys: Macon, GA, 1997) 251.

⁶ Briel, Steven. “The Means of Grace in the Old Testament.” *Divine Multi-Media—The Manifold Means of Grace in the Life of the Church*, Ed. John Maxfield (The Luther Academy: St. Louis, 2005) 103.

⁷ This is the previously quoted Point 11 from p. 74: “*The sacraments of the Old Testament are essentially equivalent to those of the New Testament.*”

⁸ On pages 79-80 of Hoenecke’s *Dogmatics* the reader finds, for the most part, Gerhard’s quotation and assessment of Bellarmine. For the sake of space most of these two pages has been omitted, with the exception of the last paragraph above, which is the conclusion to the Antithesis.