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### Recognizing the Law, the Gospel, and Gospel Application in the Sermon: A Seminar On Preaching

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## DEDICATIONS

To my father, Martin Christian Duchow, who preached the Gospel faithfully and fervently for more than 50 years, and who was my mentor for my ministry, especially from the pulpit.

And to my wife, Linda Duchow, who has lived the Gospel in our marriage and in our ministry together, and who has encouraged me often in the completion of this Project.

And to the people in the pew, who have listened to my sermons for 30 years, and by God's grace have grown up into Christ, through the preaching of the Gospel.

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## MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT ABSTRACT

### Recognizing the Law, the Gospel, and Gospel Application in the Sermon: A Seminar on Preaching

The importance of making the proper distinction between Law and Gospel clear in the sermon is nothing new for Lutheran pastors, especially in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, thanks to Walther's theses on Law and Gospel. However, the people in the pew still do not generally recognize that distinction in the sermon. There is also considerable confusion among the laity about the proper relationship between the Gospel and the application of the Gospel in a sermon. In addition, pastors often fail to include or keep in balance all three components in the sermon (Law, Gospel and Gospel application). Therefore, I designed a six-week seminar to assist the lay people in their understanding and recognition of the distinctions among the Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in the sermon. (Gospel application is the author's term for the third use of the Law or sanctification).

The class of eleven participants met for six consecutive weeks. Each week we analyzed sermons and devotional materials in relation to the three components of the sermon (Law, Gospel and Gospel application). We also focused on recognizing and clarifying the proper distinctions among those three elements of the sermon.

Various forms of written and verbal feedback were used throughout the project in an effort to measure the effectiveness of the seminar itself and the seminar materials. They included pre-course and post-course surveys, as well as a survey of the entire congregation for comparison purposes. By statistical measurement the participants significantly increased their recognition of and ability to distinguish among the three parts of a sermon. After the completion of the seminar, I revised all of the materials and made recommendations for their use in future seminars by myself or others.

This paper is divided into two parts. Part one covers the theological background issues, as they relate to the ministry of preaching in the parish. Major issues that are covered include the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, the importance of clearly proclaiming the Gospel in every sermon, the need for preaching Gospel application (sanctification) in each sermon, and the slippery slope of preaching sanctification.

Part two contains a thorough summary of the design, development and results of the six-week seminar on preaching. Included in the appendices are copies of the survey materials and class materials which were used, as well as revised copies of the outlines for the six class sessions.



RECOGNIZING THE LAW, THE GOSPEL,  
AND GOSPEL APPLICATION IN THE SERMON:  
A SEMINAR ON PREACHING

by  
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Submitted to the faculty of Concordia  
Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri  
in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

Concordia Seminary

1995

RECOGNIZING THE LAW, THE GOSPEL, AND GOSPEL APPLICATION  
IN THE SERMON: A SEMINAR ON PREACHING

SECTION I: THE PRIVILEGE, PURPOSE AND POWER OF PREACHING

A. INTRODUCTION: THE FUTURE OF PREACHING

In all of human history there have been three basic eras in the area of human communication. The first was the era of oral communication. The second age of communication began with the advent of writing and blossomed after the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in 1450 A.D. It is sometimes called the print era. The third period of electronic communication has come to fruition in the 20th century. In recent years many of us have struggled trying to keep up with rapid changes in communication. Computers are now a standard feature in most church offices, and many are now equipped with modems and fax machines as well. We hear more and more about the "information superhighway" which will usher us into the 21st century.

The question is being raised with increasing frequency as to how we can communicate effectively through the oral means of preaching with people who have been raised in the fast-paced world of electronic communication. There is no doubt that much of our American society today is being shaped by the mass media. The moral, social and religious values of our church members are being increasingly influenced by network and cable programming, the films and videos they watch, and the clever and convincing advertising

that fills the airwaves. The morals and values of adults as well as young people are being shaped by soap operas and talk shows, some rather immoral TV melodramas, and the slanted perspectives of much of the news programming. How can the pastor hope to compete from the pulpit with the powerful images that his members are absorbing from television and videos on an average of more than 20 hours a week? In 20 minutes once a week, without a video in the background, and with no sound effects other than crying babies and fidgety children, can a preacher hope to "counteract the daily and continuous bombardment of these unchristian values?"<sup>1</sup>

Richard Jensen suggests that we are now living through the second communications revolution in the history of humankind, on the boundary between the print era and the electronic era. 1985 marked a significant shift in the field of communications in our society. It was the first year that more videocassettes were checked out of video stores in our country than there were books checked out of libraries.<sup>2</sup> Jensen describes it as "a revolution that calls us to reinvestigate preaching in our time."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John R. Brockhoff. As One With Authority: The Ministry of Preaching (Wilmore, Ky.: Bristol Books, 1989), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Richard A. Jensen, Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age (Lima, Ohio: C.S.S. Publishing Co., 1993), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Jensen, p. 8.

Jensen contends that at least in main-line churches we have been preaching linear, logical, analytical sermons since the time of Luther. As we move from a literate to a post-literate era, he suggests that we need to recognize the impact of the media on our preaching, and adapt our style of preaching to an oral culture which appeals to the ear and thinks in story, rather than a print culture which appeals to the eye and thinks in ideas. Jensen suggests, however, that preaching is by no means foreign to the post-literate culture which is emerging in our society. There is much about our culture today, Jensen claims, which is similar to the pre-print oral culture. The emphasis today, as in the oral culture, is on "thinking in stories" as much or more than "thinking in ideas." "Thinking in stories," Jensen suggests, "is one way that we can structure sermons for people in a post-literate world."<sup>4</sup>

In order to communicate clearly with people in our culture, however, we do not necessarily have to radically alter our style of preaching. Jensen proposes that we think in terms of "stereo preaching." A strong part of our message from the pulpit should continue to be didactic in nature, presenting the truths of Scripture in a clear and logical manner. I would contend that virtually every sermon should include an unmistakably clear proclamation of the

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<sup>4</sup>Jensen, p. 9.

Gospel, the Good News of the blessings that our gracious God has shared with us through Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, Jensen suggests that at least some of our sermons should appeal to "right hemisphere" people. One way to do that, he says, is to wrap the message of the Gospel around stories which draw people into the message in a personal way. This enables them to experience the grace of God's love and forgiveness firsthand. He contends that in much of Jesus' preaching and teaching he wrapped his message of Law and Gospel around stories and parables. An example would be the parable of "The prodigal son and the older brother" in Luke 15, where the hearer is drawn into the story, experiencing the stinging rebuke of the Law followed by the warm embrace of the Heavenly Father's unconditional love and forgiveness. Stories enable us to get past the dominating works-righteousness theme of our culture so that we can communicate the Gospel in a way that enables sinful humanity to accept the gifts of God's forgiveness and salvation. Stories function, Jensen concludes, "to bring God's presence into our lives."<sup>5</sup>

Whether or not one agrees with Jensen's formula for revitalizing preaching, the proclamation of the Gospel is not going to disappear from Christian churches in the 21st century. From a theological as well as a pastoral

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<sup>5</sup>Jensen, p. 62

perspective, there is simply no substitute for "the foolishness of preaching," which is able to "save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Christian faith still develops and grows most frequently and most fruitfully by "hearing" the Word of God. And as Paul asks, "How are people to hear without a preacher" (Rom. 10:14)? Preaching has a future because God has chosen to channel his saving power into a word that is spoken, a word about the crucified and risen "Word made flesh," Jesus Christ, who is "the only Good News that can comfort the heart of a convicted sinner."<sup>6</sup>

#### B. THE PRIVILEGE OF PREACHING

The preacher's calling is an awesome privilege and responsibility. Our preaching is in a real sense an extension of the proclamation of our Lord himself. The preacher has to be aware that he is carrying a message from the heart of God to the hearts of God's people. The sermon dare not merely be the opinions or philosophy of the preacher or the latest insights from psychologists or sociologists or technocrats. The authority and power and purpose of the message are not found in the wisdom of man but in the wisdom of God. The message from the pulpit, therefore, must center in and flow from God's sure word and promises in the holy Scriptures. It must be the word of God

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<sup>6</sup>F. Dean Lueking, Preaching: The Art of Connecting God and People (Waco: Word Books, 1985), p. 18.

and a word from God, not merely what the preacher thinks God ought to say. It is an awesome responsibility to stand in the pulpit because as we preach, "we are engaged in God's own business of salvation."<sup>7</sup>

The role of the preacher is to serve as the mouthpiece for God. His message, therefore, must not be determined merely by the burning issues of the day, the peculiar needs and interests of the congregation or the pet peeves of the pastor. The fundamental message of a sermon must always be determined by the Word--the expression of Law and Gospel in the text and context. The pastor must take seriously his role as God's spokesman, so that the people will not merely hear the voice of the preacher but the true and living Word of God. What a wondrous privilege is given to God's undershepherd, to proclaim God's message in such a way that "his flock hears the voice of `the' Shepherd speaking his law and Gospel to their hearts."<sup>8</sup> Thus preaching is incarnational in a twofold sense. The "Word made flesh," Jesus Christ, makes use of the humanity of the preacher, even though it is limited and flawed by his sinful, human nature, to proclaim the Good News of the "Incarnate One," who came in the flesh, unflawed by sin, to become our

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<sup>7</sup>Alton F. Wedel, The Mighty Word: Power and Purpose of Preaching (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup>Norbert H. Mueller and George Krause, Pastoral Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990), p. 81.

brother and our Savior. What a wonder it is that Almighty God would take the risk of placing the treasure of his saving word in jars of clay like us. It is the wonder of his amazing grace!

### C. REAL PRESENCE PREACHING

As God's spokesmen we do not just speak about Christ. We speak for Christ and Christ speaks through us, his unworthy servants. The Holy Spirit takes our words about "the Word" from God's written Word and uses them as a means of grace, a means by which Christ speaks to the people in the pew, a means through which he forgives and heals and brings hope and salvation to contrite sinners. Preaching is a means of grace because it is the proclamation and application of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Preaching "does not merely `contain' that message; it `is' that message."<sup>9</sup> When we preach the life-giving and life-renewing message of the Gospel as God's power-filled and promise-filled Word, then our message not only talks about the grace of God in Jesus Christ; it becomes a means of grace. The proclamation of the Gospel not only talks about forgiveness, "it actually forgives. It does not simply promise eternal life; it gives

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<sup>9</sup>Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Good Preaching is Gospel Preaching," Concordia Pulpit Resources 1:1 (December 1990): 2.



eternal life."<sup>10</sup>

Just as we speak about the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, so we can rightly speak of the real presence of Christ in the sermon, because Christ is present in and through the proclamation of the Gospel. When we proclaim the Gospel from the pulpit, our words become "the vehicle for the real presence of Christ and his Gospel."<sup>11</sup> In preaching, God not only speaks through his Word, but also acts in the lives of his people. The "Word made flesh" is present to forgive, comfort and bless "all who receive him,...who believe in his name" (John 1:12). Preaching is not simply talk about God and his gifts; through preaching "God actually `bestows' his gifts: the forgiveness of sins, salvation and life everlasting."<sup>12</sup>

Because God's plan of salvation is centered in "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), the sermon must always be Christ-centered. Christ is the very truth of God, the truth made flesh. One does not preach God's Word faithfully and fully unless he preaches Jesus Christ as "The power and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). It is Christ who opens up the Scriptures for us, as he did in his own

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<sup>10</sup>Clifford Frederich, "The Proclamation of the Gospel in Word and Sacraments" (STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1988), p. 91.

<sup>11</sup>David H. C. Read, Preaching About the Needs of Real People (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), p. 20.

<sup>12</sup>Bohlmann, p. 2.

preaching and teaching while he was here on earth. Through the life and words and mighty works of Jesus Christ, our gracious God reveals to us the heart of his love and grace and truth. Likewise, as the preacher opens up the Scriptures for his hearers, God's Spirit shares the pardon and peace and purpose that is ours by faith in the Son of God and Savior of the world. Thus when the sermon is built on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ and his salutary gifts, the preacher can speak with certainty and confidence from the pulpit, knowing that a Gospel-empowered and Christ-centered sermon "is not personal opinion but the very truth of God."<sup>13</sup>

A Christ-centered sermon, therefore, is "a sacramental act of worship,...a means of grace coming from God and accepted by a person in faith."<sup>14</sup> A sermon is something that God does as he calls, convicts, challenges and comforts his people. He uses the preacher as his instrument to accomplish his purposes--to serve and save his people. Martin Luther had a sacramental understanding of the sermon. He once spoke of the real presence of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel: "Yes, I hear the sermon; but who is speaking? the minister? No, indeed!...True the voice is his, but God is speaking the word which he [the preacher]

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<sup>13</sup>Brockhoff, p. 112.

<sup>14</sup>Brockhoff, p. 109.

preaches or speaks."<sup>15</sup> A Christ-centered, Gospel-rich sermon is like a living organism. It grows out of a mysterious interchange among four living partners: God's Word, the Holy Spirit, the preacher and the hearers. Stuempfle sees God's miraculous power at work in that interaction: "A sermon in which the Word of the Gospel is spoken and heard is a miracle and cannot be manipulated."<sup>16</sup> Wedel echoes the same exalted view of preaching: "The miracle of God is in the preaching of Jesus Christ here no less than in the Water and the Word that gathered them together."<sup>17</sup>

#### D. THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF PREACHING

If we would we ask the people in the pew to tell us the purpose of preaching, we would likely hear a wide variety of responses, many of which are not necessarily within the framework and purpose of evangelical, Scriptural preaching. Many worshippers look to the sermon not only to strengthen and deepen their faith in Christ but also to provide practical guidance and direction for dealing with the problems, needs and concerns they face in their daily lives.

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<sup>15</sup>Martin Luther [WA 47:220], as quoted in Robert A. Kolb, "Martin Luther, Preacher," Concordia Pulpit Resources 4:4 (September 1994): 12.

<sup>16</sup>Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., Preaching Law and Gospel (Ramsey, New Jersey: Sigler Press, 1990), p. 37.

<sup>17</sup>Wedel, p. 24.

Others are simply seeking a power boost to carry them through the week, a spiritual shot in the arm. Still others sit in the pew in order to hear a stimulating discourse on theological or social issues. And some come merely to be entertained.

The participants in my seminar on preaching were asked on the first evening to state the purpose of preaching. Their responses included the following: "To teach and inspire," "to present the perfect, holy standards of God in such a way that the listener is driven to follow God's will," "to show us what God wants and what he has done for us," "to remind us of the Law and Gospel and help us to apply it to our lives," and "to spread the Good News that Jesus died for us so that we may have salvation." Such varied answers indicate that the expectations of the hearers are not necessarily synonymous with the goals of the evangelical preacher.

Although sermons often provide secondary fruits such as teaching, inspiring and guiding the hearers, the central point and purpose of our preaching must always be to preach the Gospel, to preach "Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5). It is not enough to offer religious answers to society's problems, to help people focus on new possibilities within themselves or to point people toward power sources that flow from human knowledge. For those answers often lead people into darkness and the shadow of death rather than to the

Light of the world. Our purpose from the pulpit must always be to enable others to see Jesus, because he is the only true and lasting source of light and hope and eternal life amidst the shifting shadows of this world. "Salvation is found in no one else," Peter emphasizes, "for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Therefore, our central purpose in the pulpit is to serve as "heralds, announcers, pointers to the Light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ."<sup>18</sup> Whatever oratorical skills we may display from the pulpit or however crowded the pews may be are secondary matters. What matters above all is how faithfully we proclaim Jesus Christ as "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), the one and only way to eternal life. The mission of the preacher is not merely to speak of his own life experiences, although there is a place for personal illustrations. Rather we must speak primarily of the great things which God has done for us and is still doing for us through Jesus Christ.

That does not require a new medium for our message, although it doesn't rule out using other types of presentation at times. Neither does it require great oratorical skills, although preachers should surely develop and use the verbal skills that God has given them. Nor does

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<sup>18</sup>Read p. 93.

it require great theological acumen, although there is surely a place in the sermon for clarifying the great truths of Scripture. Effective and fruitful preaching does require the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel, so that hearts are opened to receive God's grace and favor. There can be no other central focus of a Christian sermon. The Gospel "must predominate in the preaching of a Christian minister."<sup>19</sup>

The focus of the sermon, therefore, must always be the proclamation of the Good News of forgiveness and life eternal from our gracious God and Savior to people who are living in the midst of a darkening and dying world. What countless confused and worried people in our congregations and communities are needing and should be receiving from the pulpit are not simply a set of religious rules to live by or a set of answers for every conceivable question from the Bible but a "saving power." This Gospel power must be at the heart of every sermon. The person in the pew must never go away empty, without having been fed with the bread of life. Besides the nourishment that we share from the pulpit with God's people, we are often addressing people who are still living in darkness. Thus in each sermon "There must be enough of the Gospel that a non-Christian would hear the

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<sup>19</sup>C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 403.

answer to the question, 'What must I do to be saved?'"<sup>20</sup>

True Gospel preaching is evangelism and pastoral care all wrapped up in one grace-filled message, filled to overflowing with the Good News of the blessings that our God offers us through the perfect redemption which Christ accomplished for us on the cross. The Good News that Jesus Christ died and rose again for every sinner must be proclaimed from the pulpit week after week with freshness and clarity, as well as boldness and confidence. This Gospel proclamation is not only for the sake of casual seekers who stop by on Sunday morning, but also for the sake of the faithful parishioners in the pew who are astonished anew, week after week, by the amazing grace of God. The preacher must never weary of the Gospel message he is called and compelled to proclaim. He must keep repeating "this same old stuff, even if the people weary of it as the people wearied of the manna in the wilderness."<sup>21</sup>

As we will discuss later, a Biblical sermon also needs to include a clear presentation of God's Law, as well as the application of the Gospel to the faith and life of the hearers. But the Gospel must always be paramount in the sermon. With Saint Paul we must boldly proclaim to our people, week after week, that we resolve to know nothing in

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<sup>20</sup>Brockhoff, p. 111.

<sup>21</sup>Wedel, p. 11

our preaching and teaching "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Alton Wedel stresses that the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection dare not be confined to certain seasons of the year. The power and purpose of every sermon must be wrapped around the Gospel:

It is the death and resurrection of our Lord that snaps the padlock, opens Holy Scripture, and cracks the shell of human hearts. It is the proclamation of the death and resurrection of our Lord that builds the church, draws people to the Christ, gathers in the saints in blessed communion, reorders Christian lives, and impels responsive hearts to love, concern, compassion for a world of bruised and beaten people. It is the death and resurrection of our Lord that form and shape the lens through which we read the Scriptures and through which the light of truth breaks in upon our hearts.<sup>22</sup>

#### E. THE POWER OF PREACHING

If the words which pastors are called to share from the pulpit were mere figures of human speech, then our mission would be doomed to failure. No matter how inspiring the preacher's call to pursue "possibility thinking" or "the power of positive thinking" might be, human sources of power eventually prove to be hollow and empty. They provide no lasting nourishment or satisfaction for the hearers. The calling of the Christian preacher is always to proclaim the Word of God rather than the word of man. That Word of God is a life-changing and life-renewing word because it draws its authority and power from "the Word made flesh," who came

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<sup>22</sup>Wedel, p. 15.



from heaven to make his dwelling among us in order to share with us the fullness of God's "grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The power of preaching, therefore, is the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God. This does not mean that the preacher's painstaking hours of preparation are worthless. Nor does it mean that the form, construction and delivery of the sermon are unimportant. In fact, because we are delivering a message that both kills and makes alive, through the Law and the Gospel, the preacher's task is always an imposing one. At the same time, however, we must clearly recognize and humbly acknowledge that the power to transform people's hearts and lives is not found in us fragile "jars of clay" (2 Cor. 4:7). St. Paul makes clear that the power of preaching is in the Gospel. "I am not ashamed of the gospel," Paul declares, "because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." (Rom. 1:16).

The word in Greek for power, "dynamis," is the word from which we derive our word "dynamic." Dynamic preaching is not merely instruction from the Bible or application of Biblical truths. It is much more than offering encouragement or education or entertainment. The heart of preaching is the dynamic proclamation of the Gospel, which conveys the very presence and power of God to all who believe what God promises through the Gospel. Through the Gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit, comes "the miracle

of faith....God works, God acts, God moves, God changes human hearts by the foolishness of preaching."<sup>23</sup>

To the world around us, which is blind to "the Light of the world," preaching about God's plan to lead all people out of darkness into his marvelous and eternal light seems like utter foolishness. But in reality it is only fools who do not recognize the priceless value of the treasure of the Gospel. For the Gospel alone can and does rescue the perishing and comfort the dying. Whenever the Christian preacher becomes discouraged by the apparent lack of fruitful response from his hearers, he needs to turn over and over again to the reassuring words of St. Paul, as he himself wrestled with the fruits of his preaching: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God....We preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:18, 23-24). Having drawn strength from his Spirit-inspired conviction that God's Word will not return empty but will accomplish its purpose, the preacher is able to return to his task of sermon preparation each week, refreshed and renewed, knowing that he has been

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<sup>23</sup>Wedel, p. 23.

called "not to be successful but to be faithful."<sup>24</sup>

Another word we derive from the New Testament word "dynamis" is "dynamite." The Gospel is truly dynamite. There is no other life-changing and life-renewing power that God has given to his church besides the dynamite of the Gospel. It is essential for preachers to proclaim the Gospel clearly in every sermon for two key reasons, namely, "to effect the eternal salvation of their hearers and to empower the everyday Christian living of their hearers."<sup>25</sup> What a tremendous privilege and responsibility the preacher has week after week--to proclaim to his people the earth-shaking and soul-shattering dynamite of the Gospel. Preachers must be reminded often that "One doesn't toy with dynamite or handle it except with the greatest care."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Brockhoff, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup>Francis C. Rossow, "Gospel Handles: A Strategy for Additional and Attractive Gospel Preaching," Concordia Pulpit Resources 3:3 (June 6-September 12, 1993): 2.

<sup>26</sup>Wedel, p. 36.

SECTION II: THE SUBSTANCE OF PREACHING: DISTINGUISHING  
AND BALANCING THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

A. INTRODUCTION

As important as it is to keep the proclamation of the Gospel at the heart and center of our preaching, we must also carefully balance our message with the two other key components of the sermon, the Law and the application of the Gospel. First of all, every sermon should have a clear presentation of the accusing finger of God's Law, including some of the Biblical commands and demands by which God reveals to us His perfect will for our lives. The primary purpose of the Law is to serve as a mirror, showing us our sin and its consequences and then calling us to repentance. The "Smalcald Articles" state: "The chief function or power of the law is to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become."<sup>27</sup> Thus the preaching of the Law is not an end in itself. Nor can it function as a means of grace. On the negative side, the Law serves to lead us to despair of our own righteousness. On the positive side, the Law serves the Gospel by driving contrite sinners to Christ, who alone is our source of forgiveness, righteousness and salvation.

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<sup>27</sup>Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 303.

Luther emphasized that the primary purpose of God's Law is to serve the Gospel by "impelling us to Christ....After the Law has humbled, terrified and completely crushed you, so that you are on the brink of despair,...its function and use is...to drive us to Christ."<sup>28</sup>

Although ideally a life of love and good works should flow spontaneously from the Christian who has been justified by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus, the reality is that on this side of eternity Christians must continually contend with their dual nature. We are sinner-saints. We are saints in the sense that we are covered with the righteousness of Christ. But clinging to our new nature in Christ is our old, sinful, selfish nature, which corrupts our best efforts to please God. We are constantly in need of the guidance and encouragement of the Holy Spirit to help us grow in our life of sanctification.

Therefore, God's people in the pew need to hear from the pulpit each week the application of the Gospel for living out their faith in the midst of their daily life and daily relationships. We have traditionally called this "The third use of the Law" or the preaching of sanctification. However, I will suggest in detail later in the paper that because the Christian life of sanctification must flow from

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<sup>28</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Works, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians: 1535, Chapters 1-4 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 315.

the Gospel if it is to be effective and God-pleasing, we might better refer to the Biblical and sermonic guidelines and exhortations for our Christian growth as "Gospel application" or "Gospel exhortation" or "Gospel implications."

If our minds and hearts were perfectly in tune with God's Word and will, we would spontaneously respond to the implications of the Gospel for our life with God. But the reality of our human frailties makes it important to have a third part to the sermon. In the Gospel application we hear clearly from God's own Word specific guidelines and goals for our faith and life that will enable us, by the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel, to continue to grow in our life of Christian witness and service. In order to live as God's lights in the midst of the darkness of this world, God's people need to be reminded over and over again of ways that God's Spirit enables and empowers them to make the most of every opportunity for serving their Lord and Savior. The preacher dare not "rob his people of the direction and encouragement which they need in order to grow `to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...' (Eph. 4:13)."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Stuempfle, p. 66.

## B. PREACHING GOD'S LAW

The proclamation of the Gospel, as we have said, must be the ultimate purpose and central focus of the sermon. But the message is incomplete without the accusing finger of God's Law. Before people can appreciate the treasures of the Gospel which our gracious Lord offers freely to all who believe in his name, they must first understand and accept the depth of the problem, namely, the depths of sin which separate all human beings from a holy God. Before the people in the pew can grasp the wonder of God's grace and mercy and just how far he was willing to go for the sake of their salvation, they must realize that without Christ's redemption on the cross they would be doomed to eternal separation from their Heavenly Father. Before people can begin to comprehend the goodness of God, they must first face up to just how rotten and polluted their human nature is, and how hopeless their situation is without the grace and mercy of God.

The "Formula of Concord" defines God's Law as "a divine doctrine which teaches what is right and God-pleasing and which condemns everything that is sinful and contrary to God's will."<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions speak of three uses of the Law. The first understanding and use of the Law is as a curb, to restrain the excesses of

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<sup>30</sup>Tappert, p. 478.

wicked people in human society. According to Luther this use was instituted by God not only for the sake of public peace and order, but especially so that the Gospel could be proclaimed freely, without hindrance or restraint.<sup>31</sup> The third use of the Law is to serve as a source of direction and exhortation for Christians as they strive, by the grace and guidance of God's Word and Spirit, to grow in their life of sanctification and service to their Lord. More will be said about this later.

The second and primary use of God's Law is to serve as a mirror, so that people may see their true reflection. When the Law is properly preached, then not only do they see themselves as they really are, with all of their faults and failures, but they also see themselves as God sees them. And it is not a pretty sight. The Law not only reveals people's sinfulness, but also intensifies it. According to Luther, the Law "serves to increase transgressions.... Therefore the true function and the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness...and the well-deserved wrath of God."<sup>32</sup>

It is tempting for Christians to try to tone down the demands of the Law and thereby make it something that they are capable of living up to. But whenever people try to cut

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<sup>31</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 26, pp. 308-09.

<sup>32</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 26, p. 309.



the Law down to their size, they easily succumb to the temptation to believe that they can measure up to God's standards and fulfill God's Law in a way that is pleasing to him. That temptation, however, can be a deadly one, because it can easily lead people to trust in their own goodness and merit. Self-righteousness is so deadly because it is so deceptive. Self-righteous people cover themselves with a veil of piety and sanctity, which does not permit them to take an honest look at their true inner selves. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, the self-righteous people of our day see no need to repent. All they feel they need to do is to straighten up their lives a bit and refine a few rough edges.

That is why there can be no softening of the Law from the pulpit. Sitting in the pew each week are invariably some self-righteous and secure sinners who are relying on their goodness and merit to make them right with God, or are clinging to some source of security and hope for their life and salvation other than the merit and mercy of Jesus Christ. To those who are secure in their sinful nature we must preach clearly and forcefully the stern and convicting message of the Law, which can pierce the armor of pride and self-righteousness. Kolb suggests that the preacher must go one step further: "We must further analyze what sort of security system they are clinging to or stuck in, and how we may best hone God's Law to be that particularly sharp arrow

which will pierce their hearts."<sup>33</sup>

Walther said that when the preacher is confronted by people who are caught up in their own self-righteousness and sin, or who have found a source of security apart from Christ, "you must first crush their stony hearts....The waters of grace cannot penetrate a stony heart."<sup>34</sup> Luther preferred the image of the Law as a "large and powerful hammer"<sup>35</sup> which God uses to destroy our self-righteousness and bring us to our knees in repentance. When the smug and secure church member is hit with the full force of God's Law, he may finally recognize how desperate his condition is and cry out for help. The Law has served its purpose when it "backs us into a corner from which there is no escape and finally evokes from us a plea of 'guilty.'"<sup>36</sup> In the "Apology of the Augsburg Confession" Melanchthon likewise stresses that the purpose of the Law is to bring us face to face with the wrath of God:

For the law always accuses and terrifies consciences. It does not justify, because a conscience terrified by the law flees before God's judgment....Therefore men cannot keep the law by their own strength, and they are all under sin and subject to eternal wrath and death. On this account the law cannot free us from sin or

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<sup>33</sup>Robert Kolb, Speaking the Gospel Today: A Theology for Evangelism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), p. 211.

<sup>34</sup>Walther, p. 405.

<sup>35</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 26, p. 310.

<sup>36</sup>Stuempfle, p. 23.

justify us, but the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification was given because of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

The proper use of the Law in preaching, therefore, is not simply to wound people's pride enough to motivate them to rely on God to assist them in their journey of faith. The proper use of the Law is rather to "render people helpless in their relationship to God. The law kills us and leaves us dead in the eyes of God."<sup>38</sup> The problem, from Jensen's perspective, is that most Law preaching doesn't kill, driving convicted sinners to God's mercy. Instead, it just wounds people, either increasing their guilt and driving them to despair or leading them to think that they can heal the wound themselves. People often respond to inadequate Law preaching by vowing to improve their life so they won't have to suffer such wounds anymore. However, when the Law only wounds us, "it sends us into our own inner resources for the strength to live the good life. The law...directs us to the precise cause of our problem...our inner being."<sup>39</sup>

Such sermons often end with a band-aid of grace, similar to what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace." The person leaves the worship service thinking, "All I need to patch up my life is a little help from God. If I do my

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<sup>37</sup>Tappert, p. 112.

<sup>38</sup>Jensen, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup>Jensen, p. 69.

best, then Jesus will help me, and together we can solve the problem or heal the wound or patch up my broken life almost as good as new." Such preaching we might call "cheap Law," because it cheapens the power and authority of God. It also deceives many people, including a frightful number of church members, into thinking that they can contribute in some way to the transformation of their life and even to their reconciliation with God.

Some people are deceived by crystals or crystal balls, while others are duped by more subtle by-products of "New Age" thinking which assure us that the solutions to our problems and needs can be found in the divine spark within our own mind and spirit. Still others are influenced by Christian preachers who promote "possibility thinking" or "the power of positive thinking," encouraging Christians to look within themselves for the power and motivation to cooperate with Christ in reshaping and rebuilding the purpose and pathway for their life. The preaching of "cheap Law," which fails to accuse us and expose our sin and unrighteousness, leads people to think they can get along without the Gospel. Carl Braaten stresses the necessity of preaching the Law that accuses:

Where the law is not accusing us, there is no consciousness of sin; and where there is no consciousness of sin, there is no need for repentance; and where there is no need for repentance, there is no need for faith; and where there is no need for faith,

what's the use of Christ and the Gospel?<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, the preaching of what we might call "costly Law," serves to slay sinners and to lead them to cry out to the Lord for help and hope. The purpose of preaching the Law, therefore, is not to make people saints but sinners--to lead them to true contrition and sorrow for their sins. If sins remain unknown, then there can be no hope of a cure. The purpose of the Law is to expose the problem, bring it to light and drive us to the Great Physician, where we can find a cure for even the deadliest of spiritual diseases. That is what St. Paul was referring to when he said: "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Rom. 5:20). Walther used that same verse to make the key connection between sin and grace, Law and Gospel:

Many sins are slumbering in a person who is still ignorant of the Law. Let the Law be preached to such a person forcefully, let it strike his conscience with lightning force, and the person will not become better, but worse....It drives men to desperation. Blessed is the man who has been brought to this point; he has taken a great step forward on the way to salvation. Such a person will receive the Gospel with joy, while another who has never passed through an experience of this kind yawns when he hears the Gospel preached and says: "That is an easy way to get to heaven!" Only a poor sinner, on the brink of despair, realizes what a message of joy the Gospel is and joyfully receives it.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Carl E. Braaten, "Whatever Happened to Law and Gospel?" Currents in Theology and Mission 14:2 (April, 1987): 116.

<sup>41</sup>Walther, p. 237.

Even preaching the Law, however, must be pastoral, with the purpose of permitting God to work contrition and godly sorrow in the heart and life of the hearer. Law preaching must thus be done not in a heartless, judgmental manner, but out of genuine love and compassion for the people entrusted to our pastoral care. We dare not give our people an endless series of guilt trips. Our Law preaching must not be so severe that the contrite hearer is driven away despondent or left with a feeling of hopelessness. Walther cautions preachers not to give in to the pressure of those whom he calls "fanatics," who insist that we have to preach the Law much more forcefully. He refers to 2 Corinthians 1:24 to make the point that our purpose as pastors is to be for our people "helpers of joy." He urges his fellow pastors: "Do not become ministers who vex and torture the people, filling them with uncertainty and causing them to go home from church heavy-hearted....You are to be helpers of joy to Christians. You are not to put them on the rack of the Law."<sup>42</sup>

Thus a preacher dare not be content only to analyze our human predicament or to expose the guilt of people. For then his message only serves to deepen the despair of those who have come to worship to find hope. An overdose of Law preaching may serve to increase the burden of guilt which

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<sup>42</sup>Walther, p. 407.

people came to get rid of. The Preaching of the Law, therefore, is "always God's `alien' Word uttered for the sake of his `proper' Word--which is the Word of his gracious affirmation of us in Jesus Christ."<sup>43</sup> Walther realized that in their fallen nature human beings confuse the two and yearn for the Law as the real and proper word of God. In the process they make of the Gospel an alien or secondary word. The preacher must continually make his hearers aware that "The Law is merely an auxiliary doctrine; it is not the real doctrine of Christ. `The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.' (John 1:17). By Christ came only grace, the Gospel, not a new Law....He preached the Law merely to prepare men for the sweet comfort which He had to offer them."<sup>44</sup>

Our role as preachers is not to be a prosecuting attorney whose sole or primary objective is to succeed in leading every hearer to pronounce themselves guilty as charged. Our role is rather that of a surgeon who knows when and how he must cut, with the most careful precision, in order to bring about healing and wholeness. We must continually point and lead our sick and dying people to the Great Physician, from whom flow all true and lasting hope and healing and new life. Then rather than boasting about

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<sup>43</sup>Stuempfle, p. 31.

<sup>44</sup>Walther, p. 405.

their own righteousness, our people will only marvel at the grace and mercy of a Heavenly Father who sees us as we were, and as we truly are, and loves us and accepts us nevertheless.

That is why the preacher cannot administer the Law without the Gospel close behind, or better yet, both preceding and following the preaching of the Law. The Law does not set people free from the sickness of sin. Without the Gospel the Law leads those who are sick with sin to a state of hopelessness and despair. In the "Smalcald Articles" Luther concludes: Where the law exercises its office alone, without the addition of the Gospel, there is only death and hell, and man must despair like Saul and Judas."<sup>45</sup> The "Formula of Concord" emphasizes further that "The mere preaching of the law without Christ either produces presumptuous people, who believe that they can fulfill the law by external works, or drives man utterly to despair."<sup>46</sup> But when the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed clearly and confidently, then the slain sinner finds life and help and hope and grace beyond measure. True preaching of the Law "drives people into the arms of the Savior."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Tappert, p. 304.

<sup>46</sup>Tappert, p. 559.

<sup>47</sup>Jensen, p. 70.



### C. DISTINGUISHING AND BALANCING LAW AND GOSPEL

As we have emphasized, the preaching of the Law is never an end in itself. Its purpose is always to prepare the hearts of people for hearing the Good News of the Gospel. Lutherans have always stressed the importance of carefully distinguishing between Law and Gospel in our preaching and teaching. The "Formula of Concord" describes this distinction in glowing terms: "The distinction between law and Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly."<sup>48</sup>

Luther often spoke about the need for pastors to make this distinction clear in their preaching and teaching: "Whoever knows well how to distinguish the Gospel from the Law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian....Let the one [the Gospel] be like the light and the day, and the other [the Law] like the darkness and the night." He goes on to say that this distinction "is necessary to the highest degree, for it contains a summary of all Christian doctrine."<sup>49</sup> C. F. W. Walther, the first president of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, also strongly emphasized the significance of keeping the messages

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<sup>48</sup>Tappert, p. 558.

<sup>49</sup>Luther, Luther's Works vol. 26, pp. 115-117.

of judgment and grace in proper balance in each sermon. He went so far as to say that "Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience."<sup>50</sup>

The evangelical preacher must therefore become adept at differentiating between Law and Gospel. He must know, first of all, when to speak a word of condemnation and judgment to sinners who are secure in their sin or are relying on the false gods of this world for their security. He must, in other words, know when to afflict the comfortable with the stinging rebuke of God's Law. However, the preacher must also know with even greater confidence when to comfort the afflicted, how to preach the more difficult but the more needed word of grace and hope and peace in Jesus Christ. To those whose lives are shattered and whose hearts are broken in repentance, but yet are still weighed down with guilt, he must proclaim in no uncertain terms the cleansing and comforting and uplifting assurances of the Gospel. He must proclaim clearly and boldly the Good News that "the blood of Jesus...purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), the Good News that our gracious God has showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world as the "atoning

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<sup>50</sup>Walther, p. 1.

sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10), the Good News that nothing in all the world will ever be able "to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39). The Gospel preacher must make abundantly clear to the contrite listener that "nothing can pluck the repentant sinner from the hands of God."<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, the preacher must emphasize to the hearers that we dare not cheapen God's grace or test his patience by distorting the Gospel to make it a license for sin. When that happens, Kolb says, "we must return to the message of God's wrath without hesitation and without any reason for embarrassment."<sup>52</sup> What an awesome responsibility the preacher has. In each sermon he must strive to hold in tension and keep in balance the preaching of the cutting edge of the Law to the secure sinner and the clear proclamation of the healing power of the Gospel to the broken sinner. In his pastoral care and teaching ministry, as well as in his preaching, the minister must wield this two-edged sword with great care and concern for the soul of every person entrusted to his spiritual care. For the Word of God is both "the hammer to break the hardened heart and the balm to make the broken spirit rejoice. Only the Holy Spirit can grant the wisdom to know when to hammer and when

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<sup>51</sup>Kolb, Speaking the Gospel Today, p. 212.

<sup>52</sup>Kolb, Speaking the Gospel Today, p. 212.

and how to heal."<sup>53</sup>

Stuempfle underscores what great skill it takes for the preacher to know how to keep Law and Gospel in balance:

Preachers must be adept at distinguishing between Law and Gospel. It is through their living voices that God addresses his people either to afflict or to comfort, and it is a great art to know which form of the Word is needed and how it is to be spoken. Any confusion of these two forms results in the collapse of both. If the Law is robbed of its power to expose our utter bankruptcy before God, then our predicament is not extreme and the Word of grace is unnecessary. If, on the other hand, the Gospel is presented as in any sense a new demand laid upon us, then our situation is indeed hopeless for there remains no other Word to release us from our already impossible burden. The first error leads people into the false security of self-righteousness; the second plunges them into the abyss of despair. Either way, the result is detrimental to the possibility of a right relationship with God in which his grace and our faith live in dynamic interaction.<sup>54</sup>

In every sermon the evangelical preacher must wrestle with this tension between Law and Gospel, being careful to keep them in balance, without confusing or mingling their messages. Some preachers tip the scale on the side of the Law. They are so overwhelming in their fiery presentation of the Law and so timid in their preaching of the Gospel that the saving and healing message of the Gospel is never really heard or taken to heart by the hearers. Warneck suggests that after hearing such Law-dominated sermons people "go away with the feeling of a good spanking from the pulpit." Much damage, he says, is done, by "overkill with

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<sup>53</sup>Mueller and Krause, p. 85.

<sup>54</sup>Stuempfle, pp. 17-18.

the Law."<sup>55</sup>

Those who have already been crushed by the Law do not need to hear more of its thunder. They need to hear the life-renewing comfort and hope and peace of the Gospel. Instead of being mired down with more guilt, the repentant people in the pew need to be relieved of the burden of their guilt and shame and restored by the assurance of Christ's forgiveness, so they can get on with their life of Christian growth and service. Kolb suggests that "people of the 90's" often come to worship already overwhelmed and crushed by the alienation and brokenness and confusion of life. In such cases, he says, "The preacher need not beat a dead corpse. When the Law has already done its work, resurrection through the Gospel is in order."<sup>56</sup>

#### D. THE GOSPEL MUST PREDOMINATE IN OUR PREACHING

A serious problem develops in a parish and in the hearts of its parishioners when the Law predominates in the preaching of the pastor on a regular basis. For the Law can easily tyrannize the conscience of the hearer. The preacher must assume that all people live by nature under the Law, from the cradle to the grave. Our calling is "to rescue

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<sup>55</sup>Richard H. Warneck, "Law and Gospel Preaching," Concordia Journal 16:2 (April, 1990): 112.

<sup>56</sup>Robert A. Kolb, "Preaching the Law in the 90's," Concordia Pulpit Resources 4:1 (November 28, 1993-February 13, 1994): 3.

them from this tyranny."<sup>57</sup> This does not mean that the preaching of the Law can be dismissed as being unimportant or irrelevant or merely a necessary evil. The Law has an important role to play with God's people today, to bring them to repentance, just as it was used in both the Old and New Testaments to bring people of faith such as David and Peter to their knees in humble repentance before God.

On the other hand, the preaching of the Law must not be predominant because it has no power to save. It kills but does not give life. St. Paul stresses that the Law is powerless to help us overcome sin or to set us free from the power of sin and death, because we are spiritually crippled by our "sinful nature" (Rom. 8:2-3). The Law can point out, condemn and even stimulate sin, but it cannot remove it. Only the Gospel can rescue us from our slavery to sin and death and set us free from the tyranny of the Law. Only through this glorious means of grace does the Holy Spirit work faith in our hearts. Only through the Gospel does the Holy Spirit keep us in the faith. Only through the Gospel does God's Spirit motivate us to a life of love and good works, following Christ and serving him. Every sermon, therefore, must have as its heart and core the Good News of the life-giving and life-renewing blessings that our gracious God shares with us in and through our relationship

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<sup>57</sup>Arndt L. Halvorson, Authentic Preaching (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982) p. 143.

of faith and forgiveness with his Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is not an overstatement to suggest that "the absolute preoccupation of every preacher and every sermon should be to proclaim the Gospel."<sup>58</sup>

Walther emphasizes over and over again that the Gospel must predominate in our preaching. He believes that it is not enough to keep them equally balanced. He insists that the proclamation of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ must have preeminence in the preaching of every Christian minister. Law and Gospel, Walther says, "are confounded and perverted for the hearers of the word, not only when the Law predominates in the preaching, but also when Law and Gospel as a rule, are equally balanced and the Gospel is not predominant in the preaching."<sup>59</sup> Walther goes so far as to offer this grave warning to preachers about their responsibility to clearly and fully proclaim the Gospel in every sermon: "If you cannot come out of your pulpit without having preached enough Gospel to save some poor sinner who may have come to church for the first and last time, his blood will be required of you."<sup>60</sup>

Luther also insists that the preaching of the Gospel must predominate over the Law. He admits that it is risky

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<sup>58</sup>Frederich, pp. 87-90.

<sup>59</sup>Walther, p. 403.

<sup>60</sup>Walther, p. 409.

to do this because the hearers may become lazy in their response to the Gospel:

If you preach faith people become lax....But if you do not preach faith, hearts become frightened and dejected....Do as you please. Nothing seems to help. Yet faith in Christ should be preached, no matter what happens. I would much rather hear people say of me that I preach too sweetly...than not preach faith in Christ at all, for then there would be no help for timid, frightened consciences.<sup>61</sup>

Walther echoes a similar sentiment. He argues that if you are going to be criticized for preaching too much Law or too much Gospel, then let it always be for the latter, allowing the comfort and joy of the Gospel to be predominant in your preaching:

God grant that some day people may say about you that you are preaching well, but too sweetly! Do not hold forth with the Law too long; let the Gospel follow promptly. When the Law has made the iron to glow, apply the Gospel immediately to shape it into a proper form; if the iron is allowed to cool, nothing can be done with it.<sup>62</sup>

The proper balance and distinction between Law and Gospel, therefore, is not merely some esoteric doctrine that can be relegated to discussions among pastors and theologians. When considering what theological truths are essential for effective preaching, Halvorson suggests that the first and foremost is the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. He chides his fellow preachers for failing to

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<sup>61</sup>Martin Luther [WA 37:394-95], as quoted in Kolb, "Martin Luther, Preacher": 13.

<sup>62</sup>Walther, p. 412.



communicate this truth clearly to our people: "We preachers must assume responsibility for the sad discovery of Merton Strommen<sup>63</sup> that 70% of our church members still think that we are saved by good deeds or good intentions."<sup>64</sup> And yet this vital distinction has far-reaching implications for every Christian. It means the difference for the Christian between living under the slavery of the Law or living in the joy and freedom we have by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Walther suggested that the reason why there is so little joy in some congregations and the reason why so many church members are sleepy and stingy is because "Not enough Gospel has been preached to them....It should be the preacher's aim to proclaim the Gospel to his hearers until their hearts are melted."<sup>65</sup>

## E. PITFALLS TO AVOID IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL

### 1. JUDGMENT WITHOUT GRACE

When the emphasis from the pulpit week after week is overwhelmingly on God's judgment and condemnation, then this tends to exalt God's "alien" work through the Law, at the expense of his "proper" work he accomplishes only through

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<sup>63</sup>He is referring to Strommen's extensive study of the beliefs and practices of American Lutherans, The Study of Generations, published by Augsburg in 1972.

<sup>64</sup>Halvorson, p. 141.

<sup>65</sup>Walther, p. 406.

the Gospel. It is tempting for the preacher to focus on the Law because preaching the Law usually gets a favorable response from the people. When you thunder the demands of the Law, especially when you preach about the terrible sins and sinners "out there somewhere" in our society and world, the people in the pew usually nod their head and say a quiet "Amen." When they greet you at the door, they may comment, "Good job, Pastor! You really gave it to `them' today. I just wish `you know who' had been here today to hear your sermon!"

The problem with preaching that is heavy on the Law is that it tries to accomplish with the Law what only the Gospel can do. Lischer suggests that it often "scares the hell out of people, but fails to scare them into heaven."<sup>66</sup> When a steady dose of such graceless, judgmental preaching is heaped upon the receptive hearts of believers, it produces fear and guilt instead of forgiveness and hope and peace. Walther warns preachers not to succumb to the temptation to try to rouse the people to greater faith and obedience by placing impossible demands of piety on them. Rather the ultimate aim of the preacher must be "to lead his hearers to the assurance that they have forgiveness of sins with God, the hope of the future blessed life, and confidence to meet death cheerfully. Any one who does not

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<sup>66</sup>Lischer, "How Law and Gospel Work in Preaching," p. 6.

make these things his ultimate aim is not an evangelical minister."<sup>67</sup>

## 2. MINGLING AND MIXING LAW AND GOSPEL

As I have emphasized, the greatest challenge which the preacher faces week after week is to properly distinguish between the message of the Law and the Gospel. We dare not even hint that a person can live up to the demands of the Law, or that faith is something which we in some way earn or deserve, or that we can in any way complete our own righteousness. Even active church members, who have heard the Gospel preached faithfully for many years, may still confuse Law and Gospel in their hearts and minds. They may know well the story of the Gospel and have long ago memorized John 3:16. But often they continue to cling to at least the hem of the Law as a way of pleasing God and easing their conscience. Our human nature leads us to believe that "with a bit more effort we can earn a passing grade."<sup>68</sup>

Mixing Law and Gospel together can be compared to mixing some water colors together. No matter how beautiful they may be separately, when you mix them together they become a muddy mess. By analogy, there is a time for the Law and a time for the Gospel. You must not apply one when

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<sup>67</sup>Walther, p. 308.

<sup>68</sup>Halvorson, p. 142.

the other is needed or you will muddy the waters.<sup>69</sup> Once again Luther clarifies the distinctive purposes which God has designed for his Law and his Gospel. Luther acknowledges that the Law can teach us many important things, many "shoulds," even that we should love God and our neighbor. But that is never sufficient:

The Law can never show me how to be delivered from sin, the devil, death and hell. For this I must consult the Gospel and listen to the Gospel, which does not teach me what I should do--for that is the function of the Law--but what someone else has done for me, namely, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death.<sup>70</sup>

### 3. GRACE WITHOUT JUDGMENT

Although the Gospel should predominate in the sermon, the Law, as we have said, does play a vital role in preparing people's hearts to receive the message of the Gospel. Preus warns against a type of antinomianism that has surfaced in recent years in some Lutheran circles which minimizes or even eliminates the preaching of the Law. This has come to be called "gospel reductionism." Some go as far as to contend that the only doctrine in the Scripture is the Gospel, and anything taught in Scripture, including the moral Law, is "irrelevant and immaterial, as long as these

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<sup>69</sup>Richard Kapfer, Reading the Word as Law and Gospel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), pp. 9-10.

<sup>70</sup>Luther, Luther's Works vol. 26, p. 91.

points do not impinge on the Gospel."<sup>71</sup> "Gospel reductionism" may sound like a strange term to describe an effort to use the Gospel exclusively in the sermon. However, when you minimize the severity of the problems from which we are being saved, when you minimize the power of sin, darkness, death and the devil, when you fail to recognize and point out the deadly dangers and evils from which Christ has rescued us and set us free, then you minimize and reduce the power of the Gospel. Ironically, as such a preacher tries to minimize the Law, he ends up instead cheapening God's great act of redemption and reconciliation which he accomplished for us at Calvary.<sup>72</sup>

#### 4. PLACING CONDITIONS ON THE GOSPEL

One of the significant flaws in the message of many Gospel preachers is the conditions which they place on the message and meaning of the Gospel. All too often the people in the pew are told they must "do" something before Jesus will accept them or restore them, or before they can become a Christian. It is not uncommon to hear "if - then" conditional clauses in the sermons of evangelical preachers, such as, "If you repent and change your life, then Jesus will forgive you;" "If you believe with all your heart, then

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<sup>71</sup>J. A. O. Preus, "Chemnitz on Law and Gospel," Concordia Journal 15:4 (October, 1989): 420.

<sup>72</sup>Lischer, "How Law and Gospel Work in Preaching," p. 6.

you will be saved;" or "If you love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind, then he will accept you into his kingdom."

That message of conditional love and acceptance is often carried home to the relationships within the family. Parents say to their children: "If you are a good boy, then Mommy will love you," or "If you keep on doing that, then Jesus won't love you." Of course, if children don't learn conditional love from their parents or teachers, they will learn it from the gods of this world, such as the "Jolly red giant," who knows when we've been bad or good, but only loves us when we're good. All too easily our people carry the world's criteria for love and acceptance over to God's kingdom of grace. They have great difficulty shaking off the mistaken concept that God's love and forgiveness are a conditional gift which we must at least in part earn or deserve through our own merit and effort, rather than a free gift we receive from his gracious hand.

However, the Gospel loses some of its essential character when it is proclaimed with any conditions attached. We dare not give the impression to our people that the contrite person must prepare himself or otherwise qualify in some way to receive the grace and forgiveness offered by Christ through the Gospel. We must not say or even imply that people must "do" something in order to earn their way back into God's good graces. Jesus Christ has

already accomplished everything we need for our new life and salvation through his perfect and complete atoning sacrifice. The pure and unadulterated message of the Gospel, therefore, is that Jesus receives sinners just as they are. Walther makes this point quite strongly, out of his concern to let nothing detract the contrite sinner from hearing and receiving the pure comfort and hope of the Gospel:

Knowing himself a lost and condemned sinner and unable to find the help that he is seeking, he must come to Jesus with his evil heart and [even] his hatred of God and God's Law; and Jesus will receive him as he is....He is not to become a different being, he is not to become purified, he is not to amend his conduct `before' coming to Jesus. He who alone is able to make him a better man is Jesus. <sup>73</sup>

The Good News of God's unconditional love and grace that he offers us freely through Christ is not an isolated message in the Scripture. It is a constantly recurring Biblical theme, especially in the letters of St. Paul. The proclamation of God's unmerited love and kindness is especially clear in Paul's letter to the congregation in Ephesus, where he shares both God's merciful motivation and well as his gracious gift: "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions....For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no

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<sup>73</sup>Walther, p. 237.

one can boast" (Eph. 2:4-5, 8-9).

These clear and powerful words of Scripture have been used so commonly in evangelism programs in our day that they are in danger of becoming as overused and undervalued in our churches as John 3:16 has become. However, the evangelical minister can never emphasize too much the greatness of God's overwhelming love for us, the richness of his unmerited mercy and the blessedness of his full and free forgiveness, all of which we receive as a gift of his grace and favor through our trusting faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Walther, like Luther, often turned to Paul's letter to the Romans, especially chapter 3, to hear the clear and comforting words of God's unconditional love and grace which he offers us freely through his Son, without any merit or worthiness or preconditions on our part. After making clear that no one will be declared righteous in God's sight "by observing the law" (Rom. 3:20), Paul zeroes in on the heart of the Gospel:

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.... For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (Rom. 3:22-25, 28).

Many Christians today have difficulty grasping and receiving the wonders of God's grace and mercy, perhaps in part because we are so used to giving and receiving gifts



that have strings attached. For example, many times when people give a substantial gift or donation to a community project or university or even their church, they are quite concerned that their gift will not only be properly acknowledged for the benefit of the current generation but will also be remembered by future generations. Their gift is often given on the condition that a building be named after them or at the very least a proper sized plaque be placed in a prominent place. However, any gifts that are given with restrictions or stipulations cease to be gifts.

Likewise, if we place any restrictions or stipulations or conditions on the grace and charity of our Heavenly Father, then we make God's grace no longer a gift but rather something which we in some way must earn or deserve through our own merit or effort. And when we do that, we place intolerable burdens on the souls and consciences of our people, burdens from which Christ came to set us free. Walther often spoke of how essential it is for the pastor to fill his preaching and teaching with the marvelous wonder of God's unconditional love and grace in Christ Jesus. In reference to Paul's words in Romans 3:24, Walther wrote:

Man is not saved by his own acts but solely by the doing and dying of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ....We are justified...gratuitously, without anything, even the least thing being required of us....God attaches no condition to His grace when He proffers it to a sinner and asks him to accept it. It would be no gift if He

were to attach a condition.<sup>74</sup>

#### 5. PREACHING ABOUT THE GOSPEL WITHOUT PROCLAIMING IT

One of the subtle but significant pitfalls for evangelical ministers is to call people to repentance, which is the working of the Law, and then to preach "about" the Gospel without clearly proclaiming the message and power and promise of the Gospel. Many pastors who pride themselves on being quite evangelical in their preaching are in actuality quite stingy in their specific use of Gospel metaphors, as well as in their clear exposition of the benefits and blessings which God offers us through Jesus Christ. In recent years I have scrutinized the sermons of other Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastors in two different settings, including a group of seven pastors meeting weekly in my circuit, and twenty pastors enrolled with me in a Doctor of Ministry course on preaching. Much to my surprise, and the chagrin of some of the pastors, the majority of the sermons contained little or no specific proclamation of the life-giving and life-renewing power and promises of Christ. They all talked "about" the Gospel, about Jesus and his life and love, but their hearers never really met their Savior in many of the sermons. They may have used Gospel application or Gospel imperatives which

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<sup>74</sup>Walther, pp. 269-70.

called them to a life of discipleship. However, their audience never heard from the pastor's lips words which assured them of their full and free forgiveness through Christ or the promise and assurance that Christ gave his life "for you and for your salvation." As I perused the sermons, I could almost feel the people in the pew straining to hear words of consolation and comfort and hope flowing from the lips and life of our Lord. We dare never assume that because we are preaching to a Christian audience, we "do not need to articulate the Gospel clearly."<sup>75</sup>

It is not sufficient, therefore, just to preach "about" the Gospel or even to clearly articulate the correct doctrine of the Gospel. The true Gospel preacher must serve as the mouthpiece for God's lively and living Word of hope and forgiveness and new life, directing that Word straight to the heart of every hearer. Nor is it sufficient for the preacher just to radiate love and compassion through the warmth of his words and his winsome delivery. He must instead weave a tapestry of Gospel words and images that will focus the attention of the people on the radiance of Christ, so they can see for themselves "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Sinners who have been slain by the Law don't just need some information about where to find help. They want

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<sup>75</sup>Warneck, p. 107.

help for their soul and spirit, and they need it now. They want to hear "a word that sets them free; that forgives their sins; that gives them resurrection life." True Gospel preaching doesn't just talk about Christ's deeds performed in the distant past. It proclaims Christ's saving grace, announces his forgiveness, and shares his love and grace as a living reality in the present moment of preaching.<sup>76</sup>

There is a great void in our preaching if the Gospel is not clearly proclaimed as well as explained. For people to come to worship without being fed with fresh bread of life from the pulpit would be like being invited to a great banquet where appetizers are served and there is much talk about the wonderful chef and the great meals that he prepares. Toward the end the dessert may even be served. But the banquet concludes without the main course ever being served. The people leave the banquet disappointed and with their hunger unsatisfied.

Similarly, the Gospel preacher must never be content just to talk about the wonderful banquet that God has prepared for his people. He must always share with them the main course of God's grace in the Gospel. To accomplish this he must do more than talk about the rich food that Christ offers us. The preacher must actually offer God's unconditional acceptance and unmerited forgiveness from the

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<sup>76</sup>Jensen, pp. 71-72.

pulpit. The means of grace must not be limited in our worship to the words of absolution and the grace of God at work in Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as important as those sources of spiritual nourishment are. The life-saving and life-renewing Word of the Gospel must also radiate each week from the pulpit. And it must be more than a word that explains the words and deeds of Jesus from the distant past. The preacher must also reveal the life-giving Word of God's grace in the present moment, through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>77</sup> For that Word of Gospel alone is able to bring to our hearts and homes that joy and hope and peace which the world cannot give.

#### 6. FAILING TO PREACH THE WHOLE GOSPEL

It is certainly possible to offer a fairly succinct definition of the Gospel. One way is to define the Gospel in relation to the Law, as we do for our confirmation classes: "The Law shows us our sin and the Gospel shows us our Savior." The Gospel may also be defined in relation to our faith: "The Gospel is the promise that God accepts us even though we are unacceptable, and faith is accepting the fact that this is so."<sup>78</sup> Luther compared the Gospel to a light that "illumines hearts and makes them alive. It

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<sup>77</sup>Gerhard O. Forde, Theology is for Proclamation (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 156-57.

<sup>78</sup>Stuempfle, p. 39.

discloses what grace and the mercy of God are; what the forgiveness of sins, blessing, righteousness, life and eternal salvation are; and how we are to attain to these."<sup>79</sup> The "Formula of Concord" defines the Gospel in terms of what a contrite sinner needs to believe in order to receive God's grace, namely, "that Christ has satisfied and paid for all guilt and without man's merit has obtained and won for him forgiveness of sins, the `righteousness that avails before God,' and eternal life."<sup>80</sup> Or we could be satisfied simply to define the Gospel as "the Word from God which forgives, heals, restores."<sup>81</sup>

The message of the Gospel is so simple that even a young child can know with assurance that Jesus loves him, because his parents, his teachers and the Bible tell him so. Because God has made his saving Gospel message clear enough and easy enough for even the simplest minds to grasp, does not mean that preachers should be content to repeat the same tired expressions of the Gospel week after week from the pulpit. Rossow encourages the Christian preacher to cover all of the events in God's plan of salvation through Christ. However, he would naturally want to "say the most about the crucifixion and the resurrection, since they are the high

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<sup>79</sup>Luther, Luther's Works vol. 26, p. 313.

<sup>80</sup>Tappert, p. 478.

<sup>81</sup>Warneck, p. 102.

spots in any Gospel proclamation."<sup>82</sup> The preacher should utilize all facets of the Gospel message, including what Rossow feels is the oft-neglected Gospel image of Jesus' suffering of hell and damnation for us on the cross.<sup>83</sup>

The Scriptures are filled with a rich variety of expressions of the Gospel. Luther was especially adept at utilizing the full range of images which God uses in his Word to express the fullness of his grace and truth. Luther's sermons are endless variations on the theme of the Gospel, in tune with the appropriate season of the church year. But always it is Good News--the Good News of God declaring sinners to be righteous by releasing us from our bondage to sin, death, Satan and the Law, and then raising us from dead works to serve the living God in true joy and freedom.

One of Luther's homiletical gifts was to be able to make the message of the Gospel a personal word, addressed personally to each of his hearers. Luther emphasizes this in his commentary on Galatians 2:20, which reads: "And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself `for me.'" "Who is this `me'?" Luther asks, and he replies, "It is I, an accursed

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<sup>82</sup>Francis C. Rossow, Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983), p. 22.

<sup>83</sup>Rossow, Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively, p. 28.

and damned sinner, who was so beloved by the Son of God that He gave Himself for me."<sup>84</sup> It is one thing to believe that Christ gave himself for all the saints or even for the whole world. "It is quite another matter--but the crucial matter--to believe that he gave himself for 'me.' Here, as Luther sees it, lies the central function of preaching: to help people appropriate to themselves all that God offers them in Christ."<sup>85</sup>

#### 7. ALLOWING THE GOSPEL TO BECOME STALE OR STAGNANT

There are many challenges the preacher of the Gospel faces each week in the preparation and presentation of his sermon. Perhaps the greatest challenge which preachers must contend with is to express the Gospel week after week in words and images that are powerful and fresh and alive for the hearers. There are few preachers I have heard, other than Oswald Hoffmann, the former speaker on "The Lutheran Hour," who are consistently able to articulate the Gospel in words and images that freshen and awaken our senses. I have heard many preachers who are able to keep their audience spellbound with graphic illustrations about the powers of darkness that we must contend with in our world. Other pastors are able to speak with knowledge and authority about

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<sup>84</sup>Luther, Luther's Works vol. 26, p. 176.

<sup>85</sup>Stuempfle, p. 37.



a variety of contemporary issues we face in our society or in the church today. Still others have the enviable ability to weave the threads of modern parables into a beautiful tapestry which leaves the hearers feeling that they have experienced a work of art. But relatively few clergy have developed the gift to articulate the Gospel with words and images that leave us awestruck and begging to hear more.

Why is it that so many preachers can preach creatively, and even captivately, until they come to the Gospel section of their sermon, when they turn to well-worn cliches or a string of familiar Bible verses? For one thing most pastors seem to find it easier and more satisfying to preach the Law. The Scriptures themselves give us an almost endless variety of sins and problems and human needs to deal with. Besides offering us countless commands and exhortations for our spiritual discipline and growth, the Bible presents us with a cross section of characters who are far from perfect. God allows us glimpses of the flaws and faults and failures of many of the sinner-saints whom he called into his service.

Likewise, in our society today there seem to be endless examples which illustrate the darkness of this world and the shadow side of human beings. The preacher need only pick up a newspaper or watch the news on television in order to find a fresh problem to be preached about for every week of the year. In a fallen world "images of sin and brokenness

always seem closer at hand than images of grace."<sup>86</sup> In addition, if we are brave enough to look deep within our own heart and soul and mind for violations of God's Law, most of us could no doubt come up with enough material for a three-year cycle of sermons. Last, but not least, we may find it easier to preach the Law because we can scarcely believe the astonishing Good News of our own forgiveness and acceptance by Christ.

However, that astonishing Good News is the reason why we step into the pulpit week after week. The people in the pew who look up and listen to us each week are also there for the sake of the Gospel, whether they realize it or not. The holy Christian church is not defined by our Lutheran Confessions as "the assembly of law-abiding citizens," but rather as "the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel."<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the Gospel dare never be proclaimed from the pulpit in mere summary fashion or using only a few well-worn phrases. The people have come to hear and receive and take home with them some "new wine." And there is no new wine in the Law. A steady diet of the Law, week after week, is like eating dry shredded wheat day after day. It leaves us parched and dry.

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<sup>86</sup>Stuempfle, p. 34.

<sup>87</sup>Tappert, p. 32.

The preacher's goal each week must be to do more than whet the appetite of the hearers to the Good News of the Gospel. He must feed them with the bread of life and give them to drink of the water of life. He must satisfy the deepest needs of his listeners with the new wine of the wisdom and power and riches of God, by continually lifting up Jesus Christ as the source of new life and light here on earth and eternal light and joy in heaven.

Although there is a seemingly endless supply of images and metaphors and illustrations from Scripture as well as from our daily life through which we can express the Law and the application of the Gospel to the faith and lives of our people, there are admittedly a limited number of Biblical images and metaphors which we can use to proclaim the Gospel. Although that number is not nearly as limited as most preachers seem to think, it is not unlimited. One of the great challenges of preaching is to seek out and develop the full range of Biblical words and concepts and metaphors which convey the message and meaning of the Gospel, and then to share these Gospel images and insights in fresh and creative ways throughout the sermon. That may mean considerable extra work for most preachers, but it is well worth the effort. For there is no other source of new life and hope other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself tells us in no uncertain words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except

through me" (John 14:6).

There may not be enough Gospel metaphors available to use a different one for each Sunday of the church year. But there surely are sufficient ways that we can express these images creatively so that we will not be putting our people to sleep or causing them to tune us out at the very point in the sermon when the power of the Gospel is being proclaimed. Therefore, rather than simply repeating certain time-tested Gospel formulae week after week or merely tacking onto the sermon enough Gospel to salve our conscience, we must take the time and effort each week to "freshen our Gospel preaching."<sup>88</sup>

We can accomplish that, first of all, by expanding our Gospel vocabulary, using the wide scope of expressions of God's love and grace and mercy from the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Secondly, we must learn to weave the Gospel throughout the sermon, rather than confining it to one section in the middle or tacked on to the end of the message. Thirdly, we need to develop our own understanding and appreciation of the rich variety of images that the Scriptures use to express the Gospel and then convey these fresh images to our people in ways that will enable them to absorb them into their vocabulary as well as to integrate them into their faith. Above all, we ourselves must come to

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<sup>88</sup>Rossow, "Gospel Handles," p. 2.

appreciate the inestimable value of the Gospel and continually share that precious treasure with our people, so that we are able to perceive and receive the Gospel as "a many splendored thing," a multifaceted diamond."<sup>89</sup>

Although fresh images and metaphors for expressing the Gospel can be found in rich abundance in the writings of pastors and theologians down through the ages to our present day, the richest source of Gospel images and insights is the Scriptures themselves. The Bible gives us numerous word pictures which relate the Good News of what God has accomplished for us through the perfect life, the sacrificial death and the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ to our faith and life today. They include the following concepts:

"Salvation": Christ has delivered us from the powers of sin, death and Satan, so that in Christ we are no longer under their power (1 Thess. 5:9-10).

"Justification": God declares us to be righteous and innocent for the sake of Christ despite our guilt (Rom. 3:24; 8:33-34).

"Redemption": Christ has bought us back from our slavery to sin and Satan and the curse of the Law, through the redemption price of his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death (Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

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<sup>89</sup>Rossow, Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively, p. 24.

"Ransom": Christ has paid the ransom to secure our freedom by giving his life for us on the cross (Mark 10:45).

"Reconciliation": Through faith in Christ, we who were enemies of God have been reconciled to him and transformed into his new creation (2 Cor. 5:17-19; Rom. 5:11).

"Atonement": Christ paid in full the price for our sin and disobedience, thus bridging the gap between us and God (Heb. 2:17).

"Sacrifice": Jesus offered his life-blood as the payment for our sins and the sins of the whole world (Rom. 3:25).

"Righteousness": Jesus fulfilled the entire will and Law of God in our place, so that through faith in him we are now covered with the robe of his righteousness, which covers over all of our guilty stains (Rom. 3:21-22; Phil. 3:8-9).

"Forgiveness": For the sake of Christ, our Heavenly Father wipes our slate clean, erasing all of our wrongs and failures and removing our transgressions from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

"Eternal life": All who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ will not perish but will receive God's precious gift of eternal life (John 3:16).

"Incarnation": The eternal Word of God took on human flesh and blood and came to dwell among us in order to share with us the fullness of God's grace and truth (John 1:14).

Besides those rich and fruitful Biblical concepts,

there are many other words and names and images throughout the Scriptures which express some aspect of the Gospel message. Some of the treasures of the Gospel include the names of Jesus through which are revealed the fullness of his mission and purpose. Those names include: Lord, Savior, Good Shepherd, Lamb of God, Immanuel, King of Kings, Light of the world, Son of God, Son of Man, Great High Priest, Bread of life, Water of life, the Bridegroom, the true Vine, the Door to everlasting life, the way to heaven, the Second Adam, and even "a magnet drawing all men unto himself (John 12:32)."<sup>90</sup>

In addition to focusing on the words of Christ and the person of Christ in our presentation of the Gospel, we can also wrap the Gospel message around objects or elements which draw us to Christ and his saving work on our behalf. In our preaching we should often draw our people's attention to Biblical images such as the cross, the empty tomb, the blood of Jesus, Christ's new covenant, the washing and cleansing which Jesus provides through our baptism, Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, the fruit which we find on the vine of Christ, and the garment of Christ's righteousness.

When we have thoroughly mined the treasure field of the New Testament, we can turn to the Old Testament for a rich

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<sup>90</sup>Rossow, Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively, p. 48.

supply of Gospel metaphors. Here we find, first of all, images which point us forward to the person and work of the promised Messiah, such as "a scapegoat" (Lev. 16:7-10), "a shoot from the stump of Jesse" (Is.11:1), "a righteous branch" (Jer. 33:15), "a shepherd" (Is.40:11), God's suffering "Servant" (Is. 53), "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:6), "the sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2), and the promise that the Messiah would be our "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6).

Besides the references to the Messiah, there are a number of metaphors in the Old Testament which picture God in rich imagery, including, "our rock (Ps. 31:3), our fortress (Ps. 71:3), our tower and our shelter (Ps. 61:3), our keeper and our shade (Ps. 121:5), our shield, buckler, and horn of salvation (Ps. 18:2), our city (Ps. 48), our home (Ps. 90), our refuge and the everlasting arms beneath us (Deut. 33:27), an eagle whose wings bear us up (Ex. 19:4) and cover us with feathers (Ps. 91:4) and under which we take refuge (Ps. 57:1)."<sup>91</sup>

The importance of the preacher utilizing the rich variety of Gospel images and metaphors in the Scriptures is no less important than the physician utilizing the vast variety of medications which are available for the cure of his or her patients. One antibiotic will work more

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<sup>91</sup>Rossow, Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively, p. 48.



effectively than others in combatting certain infections. A particular medication will be effective in the cure of one disease but of no value in the treatment of another. The right vaccine will be effective in preventing an outbreak of a certain strain of influenza.

Each Gospel image or metaphor could thus be compared to an individual medication or vaccine which presents one aspect of God's cure for the sickness of sin. When we express the Gospel using a healthy variety of Biblical words and concepts and images, then we speak more effectively to the variety of hurts and the types of brokenness and guilt which are plaguing the hearts and minds and lives of our hearers. Kolb suggests that if we are to use the healing power of the Gospel to full effect in bringing God's cure to stricken sinners, we need to "pick that strain of the vaccine of Jesus which meets the particular form of the sin-sickness plaguing this sinner." And it dare not be a superficial cure. "We must be able to put the vaccine of our Lord's death and resurrection into the vein, not just under the skin."<sup>92</sup>

#### F. THE SURPRISING EFFECT OF GOSPEL PREACHING

The powerful effect of Gospel preaching should not be a surprise to the preacher. God promises us in his Word that

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<sup>92</sup>Kolb, Speaking the Gospel Today, p. 211.

the Gospel "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). But yet it still amazes us when people are brought to faith and people's lives are transformed by the preaching of the Gospel. It astonishes us, perhaps, not because we doubt the power of God, but because we know what weak and frail vessels he has chosen to be his messengers. That is why we must cling to Christ's promises rather than relying on our own well-crafted paragraphs. That is why we must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit rather than on our own human talents or some gimmicks that we learn. No matter how weak or inadequate our preaching seems to us to be, however, we dare never be reluctant or ashamed to proclaim the Gospel of Christ because through the Gospel, God's Spirit works miracles--beginning with the miracle of faith.

It should not surprise us, then, when saving faith is created in the hearts of our hearers or when the preaching of the Gospel creates new life and regeneration in the heart and life of the believer. Neither should it surprise us when the Gospel "takes all terror, all fear, all anguish, from him [the sinner] and fills him with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."<sup>93</sup> Nor should it surprise us when the Gospel transforms the hearts and lives of our listeners, planting love in their hearts and making them "capable of

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<sup>93</sup>Walther, p. 16.

all good works."<sup>94</sup> What continually astonishes the Gospel preacher is that the hearts and lives of his people are truly changed by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit at work through the Gospel. The grace of God is truly amazing!

It is almost impossible to dissect the Gospel or to analyze its power to comfort and heal and change the hearts and lives of those whom it transforms. What we do know is that when a convicted sinner hears and takes to heart the Good News that God loves us so much that he has taken upon himself all of our selfishness and sin and guilt, the Good News that God forgives us and loves us purely because he chooses to love us and for no other reason, that person will never be the same again. His life will be changed forever. "To be loved--as sinners--by a holy God alters us so drastically that the world cannot look the same again."<sup>95</sup> We preachers can only step back and marvel at the grace of God, give ourselves fervently to the preaching of his Gospel, and "let his mercy have its way with us and with those for whom we preach."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Walther, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup>Halvorson, p. 144.

<sup>96</sup>Halvorson, p. 145.

SECTION III: THE FRUITS OF PREACHING: BALANCING THE  
APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL WITH THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

A. THE DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF GOSPEL APPLICATION

Gospel application in the sermon is what we in the Lutheran church have traditionally called "The third use of the Law" or the preaching of sanctification. Although the proclamation of the Gospel is the primary objective of the sermon, "a part of the proper proclamation of the Gospel is the application to our lives."<sup>97</sup> The purpose of Gospel application is to offer believers guidance and direction for their life of Christian love and service, as well as instruction and exhortation for sharing the fruits of faith in their daily lives and ministries.

We have already discussed at length the first two uses of God's Law. The "Formula of Concord" defines the third use of the Law in relation to the other two:

The law has been given to men for three reasons: (1) to maintain external discipline against unruly and disobedient men, (2) to lead men to a knowledge of their sin, (3) after they are reborn, and although the flesh still inheres in them, to give them on that account a definite rule according to which they should pattern and regulate their entire life.<sup>98</sup>

Thus the role of the third use of the Law is to serve as a rule and guide for the regenerate believer, as he seeks

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<sup>97</sup>Frederich, p. 85.

<sup>98</sup>Tappert, pp. 479-80.

to pattern his life according to the Word and will of God. The sincere believer wants to please God by following his design for human life in the midst of his daily living. As the believer grows in the grace of God, he also wants to grow in his life of Christian witness and service, so that his life will become increasingly fruitful and will thereby give glory and honor to his Creator and Redeemer.

However, it is not easy for the believer to follow God's will faithfully and to make God-pleasing decisions, especially in the increasingly complex world in which we live. Christians are called upon to make complicated, challenging decisions today in some areas of morality and bioethics which were unheard of a generation or two ago. The people in the pew, no matter how educated they may be in the arts and sciences, need to hear God's Word applied with clarity and completeness to the decisions and dilemmas they face. In this fallen world we dare not "be naive about how distorted human knowledge of God's design can be....The preacher needs to help hearers understand the shape of God's design."<sup>99</sup>

The preacher needs to make abundantly clear to his people, however, that the motivation and energy for following God's will does not come from God's Law. St. Paul is referring to our potential slavery to the Law when he

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<sup>99</sup>Kolb, "Preaching the Law in the 90's," p. 4.

writes: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). The preacher thus must make clear to his people that in the context of our being justified before God the Law has no positive role at all. It only serves to accuse us and drive us to Christ. However, the Law in its accusatory function still plays a vital role in the spiritual life of the Christian. Because the "Old Adam" of our sinful nature still clings to us, "we must be driven to Christ daily."<sup>100</sup>

The preaching of the Law for the Christian, therefore, can serve the second and third uses of the Law at the same time. Many times a passage from Scripture or a paragraph from a sermon can serve the purpose of accusing and encouraging the believer simultaneously. Consider the following exhortation of Jesus: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23), and the exhortation of St. Paul: "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27). We might call these "Evangelical exhortations" or "Implications of the Gospel."

In both cases it is likely that, to begin with, our conscience would be pricked. We know very well that our manner of life is not always worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

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<sup>100</sup>Scott Ickert, "The Uses of the Law," Lutheran Forum 25:1 (February, 1991): 22.

We know that we have not always followed Christ faithfully. However, as the Holy Spirit removes our sin and cleanses us of our guilt through the Gospel, we hear these verses again in a new light. We pray once again for the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts so that in our daily lives we would reflect the light and love of Christ in a way that would be pleasing to him and fruitful for the building up of his kingdom. Christ's call to discipleship "both stings and encourages the Christian."<sup>101</sup> When we preach sanctification, therefore, we must bear in mind that "the preaching of the Law for any purpose must be done with the full consciousness that it crushes even when it curbs or corrects, even when it instructs or guides."<sup>102</sup>

However, to the Christian who is no longer asking, "What must I do to be saved?" but rather, "How can I love and serve the Lord my God more faithfully and fruitfully in grateful response to his grace and mercy which he has showered on me without any merit or worthiness on my part?" --the pastor needs to emphasize the application and exhortations which God has recorded in abundant measure in his Word for the edification and instruction and encouragement of his children of faith. As he shares these Biblical guidelines, the preacher must stress that the power

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<sup>101</sup>Lischer, "How Law and Gospel Work in Preaching," p. 5.

<sup>102</sup>Kolb, "Preaching the Law in the 90's," p. 4.

and motivation for our life of Christian love and service always flow from the Gospel rather than the Law, so that the hearer will never mistakenly think that he is in any way gaining God's favor through his feeble efforts to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Whatever ability we have to live a God-pleasing life flows from the Gospel and is empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit.

. Therefore, I feel that the term "Gospel application" is a more helpful term than "third use of the Law" for the laity. They must not be misled to think that the motivation and energy for their life of Christian growth and maturity in any way comes from the Law. Rather they should live with the joyful realization that their life with God is empowered only by his grace through the Gospel, as it flows to them from God's Word and Sacraments.

Once they have been motivated by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel to get growing in their faith and life of Christian service, the people in the pew may still lack the knowledge and insight they need for the shaping and molding of their life of sanctification and service. This is where the application of the Gospel plays its vital role --not as a guilt-producing message of Law, nor a shallow plan of practical tips for living a happy and successful life. Instead, as St. Paul often does in his epistles, we should move in our sermons from the Law and the Gospel to Gospel-motivated instruction and encouragement for our daily



life of discipleship in the service of our Lord. However, we must always be careful in our homilies that we never separate this guidance and encouragement from the grace and power of the Gospel. Whatever application for the faith and life of the people we share from the pulpit always needs to be wrapped around the Gospel and flow from the Gospel.

Theologians are usually able to differentiate the three uses of the Law without too much confusion. However, I have found that most laypeople, including many of those with considerable years of experience listening to Lutheran sermons, can easily become confused by the terminology as well as the concept of the three uses of the Law.

"Application," on the other hand, is a term with which our laity can usually resonate. In fact, application to their faith and life is often what they request to hear more of from the pulpit.

However, before they can fit the Gospel application into its proper role and purpose in the sermon and absorb it into their hearts and minds, the people in the pew must first grasp the essential distinction between Law and Gospel. Only then can they understand and accept that any guidelines for counseling and encouraging them in their life of sanctification must be applied using the glue of the Gospel rather than the hammer of the Law. For only the Gospel of Christ can bring about lasting change in the heart and life of the believer. Only the glue of the Gospel can

cause the application from God's Word to stick to the heart and stick with the mind of Christians as they move from the pew out into the world where they live and work and witness. The entire sermon, therefore, must revolve around and serve the purpose of presenting and proclaiming the Gospel. The Law, in its second use, is used "to prepare people for the Gospel." Gospel application is used, then, at the appropriate time "to inform them regarding God's will so that they who have been changed by the Gospel, may live fruitful lives."<sup>103</sup>

#### B. THE NEED FOR PREACHING APPLICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

##### 1. THE IDEAL VS. THE REALITY: WE ARE SINNER-SAINTS

Although ideally a life of love and good works should flow spontaneously from the Christian who has been justified by God's grace through faith, the reality is that Christians never measure up to God's ideal. No matter how fully we strive to heed St. Paul's directive to "grow up in every way into Christ" (Eph. 4:15), we always "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Throughout our life here on earth we remain "sinner-saints," who are constantly in need of the guidance and instruction of God's Word and Spirit to help shape our life of sanctification. The Christian must somehow learn to live with this dual nature. Despite our

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<sup>103</sup>Frederich, p. 67.

best efforts we daily cross the line and trespass in areas where God forbids us to go. Sinner-saints can never escape from their sinful nature. In this life "the Christian is never completely Christian."<sup>104</sup>

At the same time, however, we are "saints" in the sight of God. Because most Christians are all too well aware of their sinful nature, they shy away from being called saints. Nevertheless, when St. Paul addresses God's people as those who are "called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7), he is calling attention to the important truth that all Christians are saints in the sense that they have been declared holy and righteous by God, for the sake of Christ. In addition, God's saints are continually growing in holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. Therefore, this side of eternity all Christians are sinner-saints--at the same time righteous in God's sight, because we are covered by the righteousness of Christ, and also sinners who daily transgress God's commands.

This conflict between our old, sinful human nature and our new nature in Christ is a lifelong struggle that goes on within every Christian. This is why the ideal that our good works would flow spontaneously from our justification to our life of sanctification does not happen with any consistency.

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<sup>104</sup>David P. Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," Concordia Theological Quarterly 49:2&3 (April-July, 1985): 185.

Our old nature continually clouds our vision of God's will and impairs our ability to do what is righteous in his sight. In his summary of Melanchthon's insights into this lifelong "war" between "spirit and flesh" Osslund writes:

As one declared righteous by the grace of God, the Christian is totally saint (totus justus), but as one who retains the Old Adam, he is totally sinner (totus peccator)...As one justified (totus justus) who is in the process of growing in sanctification,...he remains partly saint and partly sinner (partim justus\partim peccator), dependent on the instruction and admonition of God's Word....<sup>105</sup>

The "Formula of Concord" confirms that since "Believers are not fully renewed in this life but the Old Adam clings to them down to the grave, the conflict between spirit and flesh continues in them."<sup>106</sup> Since in this life we are always only in process as saints, we thus continually need to hear and take to heart the guidance and instruction of God's Word. St. Paul writes to Timothy that "All Scripture is inspired by God"--for a purpose, namely, that it "is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

It is true that the power to transform our hearts and lives rests solely in the Gospel. But if we fail to follow the clear proclamation of the Gospel with the related

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<sup>105</sup>Richard N. Osslund, "Doing the Law from a Free and Merry Spirit," Concordia Pulpit Resources 1:4 (September 8-November 24, 1991): 8.

<sup>106</sup>Tappert, p. 567.

application and instruction which is so abundant in the Scriptures, we are neglecting much of the inspired Scriptures which God has given us for our "correcting and training in righteousness." The "Formula of Concord" affirms this as it speaks of how the Holy Spirit uses the written Word to instruct Christians:

The Holy Spirit uses the written Law on them to instruct them, and thereby even true believers learn to serve God not according to their own notions but according to his written Law and Word, which is a certain rule and norm for achieving a godly life and behavior in accord with God's eternal and immutable will.<sup>107</sup>

Martin Luther also recognized that this is an ongoing conflict for every believer. He described it as a war going on within us between our spirit and our flesh: "God makes this struggle between flesh and spirit with their contradictory desires, the task of all whom he causes to be baptized and called." It is evident throughout Scripture, Luther concludes, that "sin remains in the baptized and the saints as long as they are flesh and blood and live on earth...."<sup>108</sup> Luther deeply appreciated the insight of St. Paul that a Christian is "at the same time both a sinner and a righteous man; a sinner in fact, but a righteous man by

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<sup>107</sup>Tappert, p. 564.

<sup>108</sup>Martin Luther, "Defense and Explanation of All the Articles," Luther's Works, ed. and trans. George W. Forell, vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 20.

the sure imputation and promise of God...."<sup>109</sup>

According to Luther, Romans 7 vividly portrays this dilemma in the life of the Christian, who feels himself continually pulled in two directions. Through the spirit a Christian "wills the good and serves the law of God and is godly....But with the rebellious flesh, he wills evil, and takes pleasure and delight in the service of evil." According to the spirit, the Christian would like to do good and to be without evil desires and inclinations, but the flesh is "so evil and full of lusts that he does not do what he wants to do."<sup>110</sup> In this chapter Luther finds Paul struggling with his own dual nature, expressing his desire to act in a completely pure, free and joyful manner without being troubled by his rebellious flesh. But Paul cannot accomplish it, Luther says, because his flesh continues to "arouse unclean desires, even though his spirit is unwilling."<sup>111</sup> Luther urged Christians not to put their trust and confidence in their own ability to overcome their fleshly desires and inclinations. Referring to Paul's ongoing struggle between his flesh and his spirit, Luther

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<sup>109</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Works, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Jacob A. O. Preus, vol. 25: Lectures on Romans (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 327.

<sup>110</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 32, pp. 20-21.

<sup>111</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 25, p. 330.

asks, "Are you stronger than Paul?"<sup>112</sup>

Like the people in Paul's time and in Luther's day, many Christians today think they are stronger than Paul. They insist that they can overcome the sinful desires and inclinations of their old nature. But if the Christian cannot accept his dual nature as "simul justus et peccator" (at the same time righteous and yet sinful), he will eventually either become captive to his own pride and self-righteousness, or he will slide into the abyss of despair. Good intentions are not enough. In fact, Luther says, it is the lament of all the saints that our human nature still "loves, seeks and desires sin and fights and rages against grace even after grace has laid hold of this nature."<sup>113</sup> Although it is a humbling experience for us Christians to have to admit with Luther, "I always sin;"<sup>114</sup> nevertheless, we also rejoice with Luther that because God's forgiveness and mercy are more than a match for our sin, we are truly righteous in God's sight through the grace and certain promise of our Lord and Savior. Thus the redeemed child of God is "entirely healthy in hope," while at the same time "he is still a sinner."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 25, p. 327.

<sup>113</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 32, pp. 37-38.

<sup>114</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 25, p. 261.

<sup>115</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 25, p. 260.

This side of eternity the sinner-saint is always in the process of recovering from the sickness produced by his sinful nature, while at the same time he is, by the inspiration and direction of God's Word and Spirit, in the process of "being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Throughout his lifelong struggle the Christian, when he is rebuked by the Law or by his guilty conscience, laments with St. Paul, "What a wretched man I am" (Rom. 7:24). But in the same breath, transformed by the breath of the Holy Spirit through the comforting Word of the Gospel, he rejoices with St. Paul in the victory which Christ accomplished for us over the enslaving forces of sin and the Law: "Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:25).

The lifelong struggle of the Christian to live in the tension of our dual nature is by no means a hopeless struggle. When we live by faith in the Great Physician, we are always in the process of being healed. At the same time, we must accept that the entire life for the believer is a time of desiring to be righteous but never fully achieving it, "for this happens only in the future life."<sup>116</sup> Therefore, the Christian always lives in hope, including both the confident assurance that we live each day in the righteousness that is ours through Christ, as well as the

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<sup>116</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 25, p. 268.



sure hope that God's work of healing and wholeness will be complete when we join his perfect saints in heaven. As long as we live here on earth, trusting in God's sure Word and promises, we are, Luther assures us, "a work that God has begun but not yet completed; but after death we shall be perfect, a divine work without sin or fault."<sup>117</sup>

## 2. THE WEAKNESS OF OUR HUMAN NATURE

All of this is the reason why the people in the pew need to hear from the pulpit not only the Law which accuses and diagnoses the illness, and the Gospel which heals and provides the cure, but also the application of the Gospel which informs us of the proper medicine we need to keep us spiritually healthy and growing in the grace of God. Or to use a similar analogy--besides the presentation of the problem of sin which is alienating us from God, and the clear proclamation of God's power and promise in the Gospel which provides the cure for that problem, a sermon needs to include a "prescription" for the life of the Christian, gleaned from the text or context. If the heart and mind of the Christian were perfectly in tune with God's Word and will, we would automatically respond to the implications of the Gospel for our life with God. However, the reality of our human frailties makes it important to have a third part

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<sup>117</sup>Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 32, p. 24.

to the sermon where the preacher sets before the people God's loving guidelines, designed to lead God's beloved and forgiven children on their journey through life, following Christ and serving him.

With so much spiritual and moral confusion in our society today, voices are needed to speak clearly and concretely from the pulpit to the situations and dilemmas which people face in their lives each day, as they strive to grow in their life of Christian witness and service. The preacher thus must go beyond a general call to "love your neighbor." He needs to be specific about the shape that God's love will take in people's daily lives and daily relationships, sharing with his hearers specific goals and guidelines for helping them put their faith into practice. The preacher dare not "rob his people of the direction and encouragement which they need to grow `to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13)." <sup>118</sup>

Because of the weakness of our sinful human nature, as well as the powerful influences from our corrupt society, the sanctified sinner needs to hear from God's Word the clear and unmistakable implications of the Gospel for living a fruitful life that will faithfully bear witness to the hope and peace we have in Jesus Christ alone. By way of

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<sup>118</sup>Stuempfle, p. 66.

illustration and application, the preacher must help his hearers make the connection between God's unmerited grace and their grace-filled words and attitudes and actions, the connection between their relationship of faith and forgiveness with their Lord Jesus Christ and their daily relationships with the people with whom they live and work and worship, and the connection between the power source centered in the cross of Christ and the call of Christ to each of his followers to "take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). What a blessing it is for God's people of faith when by the power of the Gospel and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the word of preaching both enables and equips them to "be doers of the Word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22 RSV).

### 3. TO DEVELOP AND NURTURE THE FRUITS OF FAITH

Although the Gospel proclaims that we are put right with God by God's grace alone, through our faith alone, the Gospel does not stand alone. The proclamation of the Gospel is linked to the fruits of faith which will of necessity appear in the life of the hearer when his or her faith is genuine and alive. The Gospel "contains the seeds of its own performance."<sup>119</sup> But those seeds must be nourished and fed and carefully tended if they are to grow and bear fruit

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<sup>119</sup>Lischer, "How Law and Gospel Work in Preaching," p. 7.

in the life of one of God's saints who is still living with his "old Adam." And that includes every Christian.

Those seeds of faith not only need to be nourished and fed by the sunshine of the Gospel, the water of life flowing from our baptism, and the bread of life in the Lord's Supper. They also need to be carefully tended by the pastoral gardener who has been appointed by the Master Gardener to care for the spiritual life and growth of each plant in God's garden. This is an important part of the preacher's calling--to cultivate the soil of faith around each person, by offering words of guidance and encouragement and challenge, so that each person will recognize the fruit that he should be bearing and then, by the grace and guidance of God's Word and Spirit, will blossom and bloom where he has been planted, bearing fruit for Christ's service, as faithfully and fruitfully as possible.

Besides words of guidance and encouragement, the pastor also needs to offer words of challenge to those who have responded to the Gospel with receptive hearts. The preacher should challenge his people from the pulpit to use the gifts that God has given them in order to be and become all that they can be in the service of their Lord and Savior. He should challenge them to accept Christ's call to discipleship, as well as the cost of discipleship. He should encourage them to share the fruits of the Spirit through the winsome witness of their words and attitudes and

actions. He should motivate them with the inspiration of Jesus: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

Thus the preacher needs continually to challenge each of God's redeemed people to be content no longer with being infants in the faith who are feeding on spiritual baby food (1 Cor. 3:1-2) and being "blown here and there by every wind of teaching" (Eph. 4:14). Each week he should encourage his people to "grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Then, by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit we will witness a second miracle in the lives of our people that follows the miracle of faith. It is the miracle of the blossoming of a living faith and fruitful life of one of God's children whose "manner of life" has become "worthy of the Gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27 RSV).

#### 4. THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR PREACHING SANCTIFICATION

A superb illustration in Scripture of the proper balance between the Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in our preaching and teaching is found in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In this mini-sermon St. Paul begins with a forceful presentation of the problem. In the first three verses he states in no uncertain terms that we were by nature dead in sin and objects of God's righteous wrath. Paul does not in any way sugarcoat the depth or

danger of our human dilemma. Instead, he exposes the realities and cravings of our sinful human nature. He makes clear that if we follow its shameful desires and thoughts, we will be subject to the wrath of God.

At the epicenter of the text, however, Paul introduces a transitional sentence so powerful that it stops us in our tracks: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4-5). Having been brought low in verses 1-3 by the accusations and condemnation of the Law, the reader is then in verses 4-9 lifted up to "the heavenly realms" by the gracious Good News of the Gospel. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these power-filled Gospel words are able to transform our hearts and minds from despair to hope, from darkness to light, from death to life.

The heart of Paul's message in this chapter is his powerful proclamation of the Gospel, as he focuses on the great things which God has accomplished for us and for our salvation. He doesn't just share an offer of something God "might" do for us if we would meet his criteria of merit or goodness. Nor does he exhort us to do something for ourselves, such as, to "get right with God" or to "make a decision for Christ." Rather He focuses here solely on what God has done for us. He even repeats it for emphasis: "By grace you have been saved" (Eph. 4:5, 8). Paul emphasizes

that God has already accomplished through Christ everything that we need for our new life and salvation. God asks nothing of us--no merit or good works which would divert any of the credit or glory to us. Through our trusting faith in Christ we receive the riches of his grace as a gift of his kindness and mercy.

Then Paul assures us that by God's grace through faith we have been "raised up with Christ" to a new life with God that has already begun, and which will be fully manifested in the "incomparable riches of his grace" that we will receive "in the coming ages" (Eph. 2:6-7). That is pure Gospel, pure grace. As Luther reminds us in the words of his Small Catechism: "All this he [God] does out of his pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on my part." Our only response can be to join Luther in a joyous and eternally grateful response of praise and loving and obedient service to our great God and Savior: "For all of this I am bound to thank, praise, serve and obey him."<sup>120</sup>

We dare not close our Bible, however, when we finish verse 9, as we have tended to do with our frequent evangelistic usage of verses 8-9 as a summary of the Gospel message. Paul goes on to say in verse 10 that there are very important implications of this Gospel message. When we

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<sup>120</sup>Tappert, p. 345.

receive these precious gifts of God's grace through our trusting faith in Christ, we cannot help but be moved to put them to use in the service of our Lord. "For we are God's workmanship," Paul continues, "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). Thus to summarize it simply: "We are saved `by' grace, `through' faith, `for' good works." Good works are put in their proper place by Paul, following the Law and flowing from the Gospel. But he does not neglect the importance of good works, because they play a key role in the completion of God's plans and purposes for his people.

That plan becomes ever clearer as St. Paul unfolds the application of the Gospel for our life of Christian witness and service in the remainder of his epistle. Much of the rest of his letter to the Ephesians is a compelling exposition of our new life in Christ, filled with implications for living out the call of the Gospel as God's chosen and beloved children. Chapters 4-6 in particular are filled with a rich and varied application of the Gospel to the faith and life of God's people. That application includes guidelines for achieving a God-pleasing life of unity within the body of Christ (4:1-16); exhortation to God's people to "be imitators of God" (5:1) and to "live as children of light" (5:8); and instruction to husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters, to live with love and respect for each other (5:21-6:9). Finally,



Paul offers a powerful word of exhortation and encouragement to God's people to "be strong in the Lord" and to "put on the full armor of God" so that they will be able to stand firm in the faith and be prepared always to battle against "the powers of this dark world" and even "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms," using God's weapons of spiritual warfare, including "the shield of faith" and "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (6:10-17).

In his powerful call to God's people to live a life of sanctification that is pleasing to God and fruitful for their life of Christian witness and service, Paul is not content in chapters 4-6 with generalities. His instruction in the faith includes a wide-ranging list of "do's and don'ts," including both negative commands, such as, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (4:31), as well as positive exhortations and instruction, such as, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (4:32).

As the latter verse indicates, Paul always brings us back to the Gospel as the source of power and motivation for our life of Christian growth and service. We forgive each other because we have been forgiven by God, for the sake of Christ. The Gospel of God's love and grace and forgiveness empowers God's people for their life of Christian service.

However, it is the subsequent words of application, exhortation and instruction which offer the guidance and encouragement which sinner-saints need, so that they can use the gifts God has given them as faithfully and fruitfully as possible, for building up the body of Christ "in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:16).

This emphasis on instruction and encouragement for the Christian's life of spiritual growth and service for his Lord is not confined just to one or two books of the New Testament. In the first four chapters of his letter to the Galatians, Paul focuses primarily on the message of the Law and the proclamation of the Gospel. That includes two very clear and concise presentations of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel in 2:16-17 and 3:10-14. Then in chapter five Paul's focus moves from the Gospel to the application of the Gospel to the faith and life of the Christian. He highlights the blessings we have as a result of our freedom in Christ, as well as the problems that come when we ignore or misuse that freedom.

In Galatians 5:16-23 Paul gets down to specifics, recounting in detail the acts of our sinful nature which we must avoid, followed by a glorious summary of the fruits of the Spirit, which appear and blossom in the life of the Christian as he grows under the Spirit's grace and guidance in his life of sanctification. This is followed by more specific examples and instruction for the Christian as he or

she strives to "keep in step with the Spirit" (5:25) by "carrying each other's burdens" (6:2) and "not becoming weary in doing good,...especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (6:9-10).

Once again in Galatians Paul's instruction and application for the life of the Christian flow from his powerful presentation of the Gospel. But his emphasis on sanctification is by no means merely an afterthought. Approximately one-half of Ephesians and one-third of Galatians are devoted to laying out in clear and concrete exhortations and illustrations the direction and shape, as well as the fruit and blessings, that flow from a life that is lived to the glory of God, in the service of Christ and in step with the Holy Spirit.

The same pattern holds true for Paul's powerful letter to the Romans. In this letter Paul weaves the Law, the Gospel and the application of the Gospel throughout his systematic presentation of the fundamental themes of his theology. He focuses, first of all, on the unrighteousness of the whole human race (the Law). Then he moves on to the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to us through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross (the Gospel). Finally, he focuses on the new life of righteousness which Christians live under the Spirit in the church and in the world (the application of the Gospel). However, these themes are not confined to three distinct sections of his

letter. Rather he weaves them throughout his message, making clear that the Gospel must always stand at the center of our faith and teaching and preaching.

As he begins his letter to the Romans, Paul pulls no punches in his thundering message about God's wrath against all people and his righteous judgment under the Law (Rom. 1:1-3:20). Then in 3:21-4:25 Paul suddenly lifts the repentant sinner to new and glorious heights as he shares the wondrous Good News that we, like Abraham, are justified by God's grace through faith apart from observing the Law. Paul's emphasis on the fruits of faith in chapter 5 flows freely and comfortingly from the Gospel: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,...and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (5:1-2).

For the next several chapters (5-11) St. Paul weaves a beautiful tapestry that is threaded with all three strands of God's Word, but always with the golden strand of the Gospel prevailing. Then in his closing chapters (12-15) Paul's primary focus becomes the sharing of practical, down-to-earth instruction and encouragement for maturing Christians who are seeking, as St. Paul did, always to serve Christ in ways that would be "pleasing to God and approved by men" (14:18). Such growing Christians prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to transform their heart and mind and life, day by day, so that they will "not conform any longer to the

pattern of this world," but rather by the Spirit's grace and guidance will be able increasingly to know and follow God's "good, pleasing and perfect will," and thereby become "living sacrifices" in the service of their Lord that are "holy and pleasing to God" (12:1-2).

Once again in Romans the Christian's life of sanctification is put in its proper place by St. Paul. It is found primarily toward the close of his epistle where it clearly flows and grows only from our justification that God shares with us by his grace "through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (3:24). Nevertheless, Paul is not afraid to offer in his epistle clear instruction and strong encouragement, especially to those who are strong in the faith, so that they might witness and minister more fruitfully to the weak and erring, calling them always to find hope and peace in Christ.

This pattern of Paul in Romans is a healthy model for contemporary preachers to use in their sermons. Lutheran pastors often have three distinct parts in their sermons. They begin by stating the problem, focusing on the righteous demands and commands of God's Law, followed by the proclamation of God's grace and power in the message of the Gospel. They often conclude, then, with exhortation and instruction for growing in our life of sanctification and service. It would be preferable for the preacher to utilize more variety in the structure of his sermons, including St.

Paul's pattern of weaving all three portions of the message throughout the sermon. In this way it is less likely that either the Gospel or the application of the Gospel would be short-changed, which is all too often the case. In addition, a varied pattern is more likely to hold the attention and interest of the hearers as the preacher weaves practical application throughout the message. Above all, it helps to keep the message of the Gospel fresh and alive for the refreshment and renewal of the hearers as they hear the Gospel proclaimed throughout the sermon in a rich variety of images and metaphors.

#### 5. THE CONFESSIONAL BASIS FOR PREACHING SANCTIFICATION

The Book of Concord of 1580 contains the confessional statements of faith of the Lutheran Church. They were written primarily in the 16th century, but they still serve today for evangelical Lutherans as faithful testimonies to the truths of the Holy Scriptures. Although there is considerably more emphasis in these confessional writings on the work of the Second Person of the Trinity, especially on the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, there is ample space given, especially in the later writings, to the work of sanctification carried out by the Holy Spirit.

The actual phrase, "Third use of the Law" (also called the third "office" or "function" of the Law), is used only in the "Formula of Concord" of 1577. It refers to the use

of God's Law in instructing and guiding the regenerate Christian in his life of Christian sanctification and growth. However, the earlier confessional writings, including the "Apology of the Augsburg Confession" of 1531, also speak about the importance of good works being done by the Christian in response to the Gospel and guided by the teaching of the law: "Good works should be done because God has commanded them and in order to exercise our faith, to give testimony, and to render thanks."<sup>121</sup>

Although Luther himself never specifically uses the term "Third use of the Law," he does use the word "exhortations" to speak of the instruction from God's Word for those who are justified. Such teaching, according to Luther, follows after the promises of the Gospel and serves the purpose of stirring up in Christians the fruits of the Spirit and the righteousness of Christ which has been imputed to them. In 1525 Luther writes:

Exhortations...are intended to stir up those who have obtained mercy and have been justified already, to be energetic in bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit and of the righteousness given them, to exercise themselves in love and good works, and boldly to bear the cross and all the other tribulations of the world.<sup>122</sup>

In speaking about our life of Christian growth in sanctification, Luther's protege, Philip Melanchthon,

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<sup>121</sup>Tappert, p. 133.

<sup>122</sup>Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, (Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1957). p. 180.

introduced the phrase "the third 'office' of the Law." He wrote: "The third office of the Law is for those who are righteous by faith so that it might teach them of good works, seeking the works which please God. It commands certain works in which obedience toward God is exercised."<sup>123</sup> In the "Apology" Melanchthon writes further about the positive role which the guidelines of God's Law play in the life of the regenerate Christian. Early in the section on "Love and the Keeping of the Law," he makes clear that we cannot love God or perform good works that are pleasing to him until "we have been justified and regenerated by faith" and "receive the Holy Spirit." He maintains that before the Spirit is received by faith, the Law works on the unregenerate person only through its second use: "The law always accuses us, it always shows that God is wrathful. We cannot love God until we have grasped his mercy by faith. Only then does he become an object that can be loved."<sup>124</sup>

After stating the accusatory role of the Law and its purpose to drive us to Christ, Melanchthon emphasizes the centrality of the Gospel: "Christ was given so that for his sake we might receive the gift of the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, to bring forth in us eternal

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<sup>123</sup>Philip Melanchthon, Corpus Reformatorum, ed. Henry Bindseil (Brunswick and Hallis: C. A. Schwaetschke and Son, 1842-1858): 21:406, quoted in Osslund, p. 8.

<sup>124</sup>Tappert, pp. 124-25.



righteousness and a new and eternal life."<sup>125</sup> But he does not conclude there. He goes on to say that the regenerate person who has received these gifts of God's forgiveness and righteousness through the Holy Spirit is able to keep the Law in a way that is pleasing to God: "Therefore we cannot correctly keep the law unless by faith we have received the Holy Spirit. Paul says that faith does not overthrow but upholds the law (Rom. 3:31) because the law can be kept only when the Holy Spirit is given."<sup>126</sup>

Although Melanchthon does not use the actual term "third use of the Law" in the "Apology," he does emphasize that growth in our life of sanctification is necessary and important for the justified Christian. He states:

We also hold that the keeping of the law should begin in us and increase more and more....We teach, furthermore,...that God is pleased when we keep it--not because we live up to it but because we are in Christ....So it is clear that we require good works. In fact we add that it is impossible to separate faith from love for God.<sup>127</sup>

Near the conclusion of this section of the "Apology," Melanchthon clarifies and limits the meaning of the phrase "the law always accuses." This phrase is sometimes taken out of context to try to prove that the accusatory function is the only legitimate function of the Law, thus eliminating

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<sup>125</sup>Tappert, p. 125.

<sup>126</sup>Tappert, p. 125.

<sup>127</sup>Tappert, p. 126.

any need for preaching sanctification. We read that the "keeping of the law does not please God for its own sake, but for the sake of faith in Christ. Without this, the law always accuses us."<sup>128</sup> Thus when we keep the Law solely for the sake of Christ's glory and honor, our good works are pleasing to God, even though we always keep the Law imperfectly. The "Apology" summarizes the teaching of Paul in Galatians 3:13 and Colossians 2:10 as follows: "Though you are still far away from the perfection of the law, still the remnants of your sin do not condemn you, because for Christ's sake we have a firm and sure reconciliation through faith, though sin still sticks to your flesh."<sup>129</sup>

Henry Eggold suggests that when the "Apology" declares that the Law always accuses, "it is not intending to say that it `only' accuses, as though that were the sole function." The third use of the Law is given to the Christian as "instruction for one's conduct."<sup>130</sup> The "true function of the Law," according to "The Formula of Concord," is not only to "rebuke sin," but also "to give instruction about good works."<sup>131</sup>

The "Formula of Concord" speaks at considerable length

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<sup>128</sup>Tappert, p. 130.

<sup>129</sup>Tappert, p. 131.

<sup>130</sup>Henry J. Eggold, "The Third Use of the Law," The Springfielder 27:1 (Spring, 1963): 20.

<sup>131</sup>Tappert, p. 561.

to the subject of the third use of the Law as it responds to a controversy among Lutheran theologians as to "whether or not the law is to be urged upon reborn Christians."<sup>132</sup> The answer in both the "Epitome" and the "Solid Declaration" of the "Formula" is a careful but clear "yes." The Solid Declaration rejects the view of the so-called "Gnesio-Lutherans," who taught that "the regenerated do not learn the new obedience (that is, in what good works they should walk) from the Law."<sup>133</sup> Instead, the writers of the document state unequivocally:

We unanimously believe, teach and confess that, although truly believing Christians, having been genuinely converted to God and justified, have been freed and liberated from the curse of the law, they should daily exercise themselves in the law of the Lord....For the law is a mirror in which the will of God and what is pleasing to him is correctly portrayed. It is necessary to hold this constantly before believers' eyes and continually urge it upon them with diligence.<sup>134</sup>

If believers were perfectly renewed in this life through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit so that they would be totally free from sinning, then "they would require no law, no driver."<sup>135</sup> But the reality is, according to the "Solid Declaration," that "In this life Christians are not renewed perfectly and completely. For although their sins

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<sup>132</sup>Tappert, p. 480.

<sup>133</sup>Tappert, p. 564.

<sup>134</sup>Tappert, p. 564.

<sup>135</sup>Tappert, p. 564.

are covered up through the perfect obedience of Christ,...nevertheless the Old Adam still clings to their nature and to all its internal and external powers."<sup>136</sup> The same thought comes through even more clearly in the "Epitome," which indicates that because our regeneration and renewal are far from complete in this world, and because Christians are constantly struggling with their sinful human nature, "It is necessary for the law of God constantly to light their way lest in their merely human devotion they undertake self-decreed and self-chosen acts of serving God,...[and] lest the Old Adam go his own self-willed way."<sup>137</sup>

There are two key words in this last quote--"necessary" and "constantly." The third use of the Law is not optional but fully necessary in order to light the way of the Christian on his journey through life, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In addition, the use of God's Law as a rule and guide is not something the believer needs only occasionally. Christians need to hear and heed the exhortations and instruction of the Law continually. According to "The Formula of Concord," this daily teaching from God's Word should include admonition as well as instruction: "Because of the desires of the flesh the truly

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<sup>136</sup>Tappert, p. 565.

<sup>137</sup>Tappert, p. 480.

believing, elect, and reborn children of God require in this life not only the daily teaching and admonition, warning and threatening of the law, but frequently the punishment of the law as well, to egg them on so that they follow the Spirit of God."<sup>138</sup> However, when a person is born anew by the Spirit of God and is liberated from the law, he will gladly be led and driven by the Spirit of Christ. The regenerate Christian, therefore, will strive to walk in the fruits of the Spirit each day, not reluctantly or under compulsion, but "from a free and merry spirit."<sup>139</sup>

Article VI of the "Solid Declaration" of the "Formula of Concord" asserts in no uncertain terms in its concluding paragraph that those who reject "The third function of the Law" are teaching and preaching contrary to the true teachings of Scripture:

Hence we reject and condemn, as pernicious and contrary to Christian discipline and true godliness, the erroneous doctrine that the law in the manner and measure indicated above is not to be urged upon Christians and true believers but only upon unbelievers, non-Christians, and the unrepentant.<sup>140</sup>

## 6. SANCTIFICATION IN RELATION TO JUSTIFICATION

The preaching of sanctification is appropriate only when it has been made abundantly clear to the hearers that

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<sup>138</sup>Tappert, p. 565.

<sup>139</sup>Tappert, p. 566.

<sup>140</sup>Tappert, p. 568.

they cannot and must not contribute anything to their own salvation. The application of the Gospel is thus to be shared with those who are secure in the grace of Christ. Although the importance of believers living a life of good works and growing in holiness in Christ must be emphasized by the preacher, "this message must never overpower the proper proclamation of the Gospel. For these good works are not a means of grace and can never substitute for the Gospel."<sup>141</sup>

The Gospel, therefore, must always be the driving force behind our life of love and good works. The key to our life of sanctification is the motivation which flows to us from the confidence we have in our justification by grace through faith. And that motivation, as St. Paul indicates, is the compelling love of Christ: "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that...he died for all, [so] that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14).

Because our motivation is always the love of Christ, sanctification in our preaching always needs to be closely related to justification. Our life of love and good works can never stand alone, apart from the Gospel of Christ. Sanctification is a process. We are continually becoming the person God intends for us to be. But we cannot grow in

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<sup>141</sup>Frederich, p. 38

our Christian life if we lose sight of our ultimate goal of eternal life with Christ or if the connection with the power base of the Gospel is broken. Sanctification thus occurs through the process of preaching as we continually point our people back in time to God's love centered in the cross, while at the same time constantly pointing them forward to the blessed inheritance which God has in store for us in heaven (2 Tim. 4:8).

Although the Bible often distinguishes sharply between justification and sanctification and between faith and good works, in order to make clear that we are saved only through faith, just as often, Rossow contends, "the Bible presents justification and sanctification as a unity, as two equivalent thrusts of one divine plan." Faith and good works, he says, are an interdependent entity, "two sides of the same coin."<sup>142</sup> The Biblical imagery of redemption and ransom also indicates the unity of faith and good works in God's total plan for his people. In our everyday life, for example, property is redeemed or purchased, not merely so that it belongs to the owner, but also so that it may be cultivated and bear fruit. Likewise, in our spiritual life "God buys us so that we might be saved and so that we might do good works....[They are] equivalent aspects of one divine

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<sup>142</sup>Rossow, "Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively," p. 42.

plan."<sup>143</sup>

Halvorson suggests that sanctification "is not the other side of the coin so much as it is an extension of justification."<sup>144</sup> He describes sanctification as God's daily pressure on us to hear and heed his Gospel pronouncement and to share this Good News gladly with others through the witness of our words and our loving acts. He also concludes, however, that sanctification and justification are not to be separated. In our preaching, as well as in the faith and life of the Christian, they should "grow together like twin branches of a tree. Both gifts flow from his [God's] undeserved goodness." And both gifts should be shared by the preacher so winsomely and compellingly that the hearers will be eager to open their hearts and lives to receive and use them to the glory of God and according to his good and gracious will.<sup>145</sup>

This is also the thrust of St. Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 6. After calling the believers to a life of holiness and purity, he reminds them of the wicked lives that some of them once had led. Then he adds: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God"

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<sup>143</sup>Rossow, "Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively," p. 42.

<sup>144</sup>Halvorson, pp. 155-57.

<sup>145</sup>Halvorson, p. 158.



(1 Cor. 6:11). Here St. Paul intertwines Gospel and Gospel application by surrounding his call to live a sanctified life with the means of grace, which are the source and power for our life of sanctification. The power and motivation for growing in our life of purity and holiness flow from the washing of baptism and our justification which Christ achieved for us on the cross. But our life of sanctification is right in the middle of it all, making clear that being sanctified is just as much a part of God's plans and purposes for his people as being justified is. God's act of justification in Christ precedes and empowers our life of sanctification, but you can't have one without the other.

Although the Holy Spirit is the driving power in our life of sanctification, we are not puppets or robots. The believer cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification. Chemnitz stresses that after the Holy Spirit has already begun in us the work of renewal and growth, "we also can and should add our effort, by following the leadership of the Holy Spirit and mortifying the works of the flesh through the Spirit....And what is more, for this the Holy Spirit uses as ordinary means the preaching, hearing and meditation of the divine Word."<sup>146</sup> St. Paul

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<sup>146</sup>Martin Chemnitz, Ministry, Word and Sacraments: An Enchiridion, ed. and trans. Luther Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 101.

makes this clear when he tells God's saints in Philippi: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). This verse is often misunderstood to mean that Christians must do something toward achieving their own salvation. What Paul is talking about here is really our life of sanctification. He is saying that justified believers are to work with the Holy Spirit so that the fruits of our salvation will be clearly manifest in our life of witness and service to our Savior. For in the very next breath Paul reminds us that "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:13).

Luther likewise keeps coming back to justification when he is talking about sanctification. Like Paul, he does not want anyone to be confused and think that the power and ability for our good works is due in any part to our own merit or effort. Luther always makes clear that good works are a consequence of grace and not its cause. However, "because he views man so realistically as at once `justified and sinner,' he recognizes the need for something like `the call to obedience' to incite the Christian to side with the Spirit in its continual struggle against the flesh."<sup>147</sup> Luther himself says that "faithful preachers must exert themselves as much in urging a love that is unfeigned or in

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<sup>147</sup>Stuempfle, p. 65.

urging truly good works as in teaching true faith."<sup>148</sup> In his 1535 lectures on Galatians, Luther urges preachers to preach sanctification to Christians and to teach them good works just as strongly as they preach the Gospel to them. This admonishing and urging is necessary, Luther says, because "in the justified there remain remnants of sin, which deter and dissuade them, both from faith and from truly good works."<sup>149</sup>

The preacher must always endeavor to keep justification and sanctification in proper balance, as the Scriptures clearly do. Harold Senkbeil urges us to avoid what he calls "two equally dangerous extremes." He warns first and foremost about allowing sanctification to predominate over justification, as he says is happening among those preachers who advocate or at least imply that our certainty of faith is based at least to some degree on our inner feelings, inner light or inner peace. Whenever guilty consciences are directed to our inner feelings for certainty of salvation, Senkbeil warns, "faith is immediately in jeopardy, because the Spirit's work inside the Christian is always hampered by

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<sup>148</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Works, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians: 1535, Chapters 5-6 (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 54.

<sup>149</sup>Luther, Luther's Works vol. 27, p. 54.

the sinful nature."<sup>150</sup> Therefore, when we talk about the power for our sanctified life, "we dare never stop talking about Christ."<sup>151</sup> On the other hand, Senkbeil cautions us not to separate our Christian faith from the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit: "When faith is held to have no connection with life and the sanctifying power of the Spirit is denied, God's gift of grace is robbed of its power."<sup>152</sup>

#### 7. THE GOSPEL APPLICATION WE NEED TO PREACH

Gospel application, as we have said, is not the Gospel, but it does reveal the good and gracious will of God to those who have been "Gospelized," those who have been justified by grace and are in the process of being made holy by the Holy Spirit. In the process of sanctification the Christian is not motivated by these Scriptural or homiletical instructions and guidelines. They flow from the Gospel but they are not the Gospel, which alone is our motivating power. On the one hand, we must be careful not to imply that Gospel implications or exhortations have anything to do with our salvation. But, on the other hand,

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<sup>150</sup>Harold L. Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action: Evangelical Challenge and Lutheran Response (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), pp. 113-14.

<sup>151</sup>Senkbeil, p. 121.

<sup>152</sup>Senkbeil, p. 114.

this Gospel application serves an important purpose. It "does teach us what the will of God is...[and] informs us about holy living."<sup>153</sup>

In our zeal to emphasize justification through faith without the works of the Law, we preachers have sometimes contributed to the problem of church members not taking seriously the importance of growing in their life of sanctification. Christians increasingly are ignoring or rationalizing their way around the clear moral blueprint for our life of Christian growth and witness that is laid out for us in abundant measure throughout the Scriptures. Stuempfle cautions: "In our nervousness not to introduce... 'works righteousness' into the Gospel of free grace, we have tended to keep silent about the quality of life which issues from it."<sup>154</sup> God's Word states quite clearly that faith in Christ brings us freedom to perform good works without being condemned and bound by the Law (Rom. 8:1). Thus we should think about the fruit of the Gospel that we bear in our daily life not as works of Law but works of love.

Stuempfle further suggests that instead of speaking of the "third use of the Law" we should talk about the "second use of the Gospel," which he describes as "faith active in love, doing the works of the law spontaneously, without

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<sup>153</sup>Frederich, pp. 37-38.

<sup>154</sup>Stuempfle, p. 63.

seeking rewards."<sup>155</sup> A. R. Kretzmann suggests further that the term "third use of the Law" can be confusing for pastors as well as laity. He recommends that we substitute an expression such as "Gospel exhortations" or "exhortations of grace." These phrases, he says, more clearly distinguish the application of the Gospel from the commands and demands of the Law. They also indicate that such Gospel application is "addressed to believers only."<sup>156</sup>

Using a term such as "Gospel exhortations" or "Gospel application" or "Gospel implications" rather than "the third use of the Law" makes clearer, I believe, that the responses which God desires in our life are based on what he has done for us in and through Christ and are produced in us through the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. These Gospel exhortations in the Scripture and in the sermon encourage and instruct the Gospel-empowered Christian to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12), encouraging the believer to put on "the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:11). We must never forget, however, that all of the credit for our growth in grace and good works must be given to Jesus Christ alone. The preacher must remind his hearers often

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<sup>155</sup>Braaten, p. 117.

<sup>156</sup>A. R. Kretzmann, Law and Gospel (St. Louis: The Faith Forward Executive Committee, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, [1965]), p. 18.

that "It is God Himself who produces in us the will to do the work to which the new man is being exhorted. All our good works are works of God Himself which He works in us and through us. They are His gift, but it is our task to walk in them."<sup>157</sup>

### C. THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF PREACHING SANCTIFICATION

#### 1. PLACING THE GOSPEL IN A SUBSERVIENT ROLE

Although the progression of a sermon is often from Law to Gospel to application, we must be careful that we never imply that the application to the faith and life of the hearer is the ultimate goal of preaching. Many preachers today are falling into the trap of trying to satisfy the supposed thirst of "baby boomers" and "baby busters" for practical application and life-related illustrations in the sermon at the expense of the clear proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel, not the Law in its second or third use, is the means through which God's shares his grace and favor with us. In addition, we can never presuppose that the people in the pew know the Gospel sufficiently well so that we can be satisfied merely to imply the Gospel message or to skim over it. And even if our people would know the Gospel quite well, it must still be the focus and highlight of the sermon because the Gospel is the power source for our

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<sup>157</sup>Kretzmann, p. 30.

salvation, as well as for our life of sanctification. Therefore, the Gospel must never be simply inferred or "be placed in a subservient role."<sup>158</sup>

Ralph Bohlmann notes that the three purposes of the Law play a vital but always subservient role to the proclamation of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. The Law, he says, "warns us to keep from sin, accuses us of sin, and instructs Christian believers how to live. All three uses of the law are vitally important, but the law must never supplant the central place of the Gospel." And if any of these three uses of the Law serve to squeeze the Gospel out of the sermon entirely, then, he claims, it is not really even Christian preaching at all. A sermon without Gospel content, Bohlmann concludes, "is not preaching in the Biblical, Lutheran sense of the term, nor is it a means of grace."<sup>159</sup> On the other hand, David Scaer makes the point that a sermon which "offers a valid, dogmatic Christology, but without involving the deepest parts of the hearer's existence and behavior, is little more than an academic lecture."<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>Frederich, p. 86.

<sup>159</sup>Bohlmann, p. 2.

<sup>160</sup>David P. Scaer, "Preaching Sanctification," Concordia Pulpit Resources 4:4 (September 11-November 20, 1994): 2.



## 2. THE DANGER OF MORALISM

Moralism has become very common in sermons today as a substitute for the clear proclamation of the Gospel. Moralism takes a moral quality and makes that quality the motive for our life of Christian growth and discipleship. Moralism holds up and promotes virtues which are appropriate in their proper place but then elevates them above the Gospel. A moralistic sermon takes Biblical virtues such as humility, kindness and goodness and instead of offering them as possible consequences or fruits of the Gospel, "prescribes them as the means by which the grace of God is apprehended."<sup>161</sup> We lapse into moralism, Osslund says, "whenever we suggest that we please God by the quality of the activities we do or by the quantity of the gifts we give."<sup>162</sup>

Moralism should not be confused with morality. Moralism makes of morality an end in itself. Moralism is the attempt to shape one's life and live one's life according to certain directives and rules, most of which are negative prohibitions. According to Scaer, sanctification deteriorates into moralism when justification is seen only as something in the past, and "sanctification or the

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<sup>161</sup>Lischer, "How Law and Gospel Work in Preaching," p. 7.

<sup>162</sup>Osslund, p. 9.

Christian life is seen as...a current or future action."<sup>163</sup>  
Preachers can avoid slipping into moralism by not allowing application to precede the Gospel or to predominate in the sermon. We must be careful, as Luther emphasized, to make absolutely clear to our people that good works are a fruit of faith and not a cause of faith. "Good works do not make a good man," Luther said, "but a good man does good works."<sup>164</sup>

Preachers must beware, therefore, of urging on their people the kind of piety which mingles Law and Gospel and makes piety and perfectionism the standard for healthy Christians or for a healthy congregation. We dare not make the elimination of anxiety and despair or the achieving of a certain level of joy and piety a litmus test of genuine Christianity. Romans 7, as well as our own experience as pastors, tell us that even in the healthiest of congregations we will see Christians slugging it out with temptation and wrestling with their own sinful flesh. Warneck reminds us that the flocks we are called to shepherd are made up entirely of "saints and sinners."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup>David P. Scaer, "Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions," Concordia Theological Quarterly 53:3 (July, 1989): 165.

<sup>164</sup>Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," Luther's Works ed. Harold J. Grimm and trans. W. A. Lambert, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 361.

<sup>165</sup>Warneck, p. 116.

On the other hand, we dare not be so cautious that we fail to encourage sinner-saints to grow and mature in their life of sanctification. Because of our fear that our people might look on their good works as being meritorious, we cannot obscure God's will for them by failing to instruct them and encourage them in their lives of Christian service and discipleship. Frederich feels that "One could hardly preach the Word and not present these commands and guidelines which no longer frighten us (as they do in the second use of the Law) but aid us in our desire to live as the redeemed people of God."<sup>166</sup>

### 3. MINIMIZING OR REJECTING THE NEED TO PREACH SANCTIFICATION

#### a. DOES SANCTIFICATION AUTOMATICALLY FOLLOW JUSTIFICATION?

Some Lutheran theologians today are trying to deny or severely limit the application of the third use of the Law, especially in preaching. They contend that sanctification in the life of a Christian is an automatic and immediate response to the proclamation of justification through faith in Christ. Scaer suggests that "When the message of Christ is heard and believed, immediately it begins working itself out in sanctification."<sup>167</sup> He contends that "Good works naturally flow from the preaching of Christ, which is by

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<sup>166</sup>Frederich, p. 85.

<sup>167</sup>Scaer, "Preaching Sanctification," p. 4.

definition the preaching of the Gospel of justification."<sup>168</sup>

However, Gospel preachers know from experience that good works and a sanctified life do not flow naturally and automatically through the lives of many of the sinner-saints sitting in the pew. Those who are no longer asking, "What must I do to be saved?" but who are still "babes in the faith" are asking, "What then shall I do as a follower of Christ?" The Holy Spirit through the Gospel has prepared them for a life of good works, but they need to know where to start walking in them, what direction they should be going and what shape their response to the Gospel should take. New Christians especially, but also veterans of the faith, do not know "naturally" how to respond to the Gospel. Rather, through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, sanctification occurs in the life of the Christian. To be sure, our good works are prompted and empowered by the Gospel. But the sinner-saint also needs the guidance and instruction that God has recorded for us abundantly in his inspired and inspiring Biblical Word.

Scaer suggests, however, that when Christ is properly proclaimed, sanctification will necessarily follow even though the Christian may not be conscious of it:

"Sanctification is preached when Christ is proclaimed so that the hearer is taken up into Christ's life and death,

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<sup>168</sup>Scaer, "Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions," p. 167.

and the good works performed by Christ are now done in, with, and through the believer--even without necessarily being conscious of them."<sup>169</sup> But God did not create us nor does he re-create us to be puppets and robots who perform good works without even being conscious of them. It seems as if Scaer may have crossed the slippery slope into what we might call "sanctification reductionism," which can be almost as detrimental to the faith and life of the Christian as "Gospel reductionism." Scaer goes so far as to say that "Reforming the sinner as a goal is hardly Lutheran....The goal in Lutheran theology is to preach the Gospel of Christ and that preaching will by itself reform the sinner, but never completely....The preaching of the Gospel in the moment that it is preached justifies the sinner and makes him abound in good works."<sup>170</sup>

The receiving of the Gospel through faith surely does justify the sinner, and we dare never minimize that miracle of God's grace. However, any pastor who has preached year after year to a cross-section of justified sinners in the pew knows all too well that the blessing of justification does not immediately and automatically "make" the Christian "abound in good works." Why the fruits of sanctification and good works blossom more quickly and fully in the lives

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<sup>169</sup>Scaer, "Preaching Sanctification," p. 2.

<sup>170</sup>Scaer, "Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions," p. 169.

of some sinner-saints than others is as impossible to know this side of eternity as the age old question in relation to justification: "Why some and not others?"

What we do know from Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as the pastor's own experience in his Law and Gospel ministry with his people, is that the Law in its third use does have a positive, informative function in the lives of Christians. The important distinction that exists between the Law and the Gospel must not be understood, therefore, as a kind of antagonism between them. Nor is there an antagonism between justification and sanctification. The doctrine of justification itself not only preserves these proper distinctions, but also guarantees their fundamental unity of purpose--to make disciples for Christ and to help those disciples grow in the grace of God and the service of his mission and ministry. In relation to the effect of justification on the Law Paul asks, "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith?" "Not at all!" he replies. "Rather, we uphold the law" (Rom. 3:31).

After presenting his argument that there is no necessity to preach sanctification or the third use of the Law, Scaer goes on to paint a more positive view of the need for preaching sanctification. In fact, he proposes that occasionally the sermon should focus primarily on sanctification--addressing particular concerns and problems, identifying certain sins and suggesting specific actions.

When we preach sanctification, Scaer says, we must deal realistically with the dual nature Christians have as saints and sinners. The preacher must move "back and forth between these opposing realities. The sanctification sermon originates in and thrives because of this contradiction that God's people are `simul justus et peccator,' both condemned under the Law and pardoned by the Gospel at the same time....God's people struggle with this contradiction as long as they live on earth."<sup>171</sup> Although Scaer emphasizes that the Gospel alone provides the motivation for our good works, he admits that the third use of the Law does play a significant role in our Christian life and growth:

Without a third use of the law, we are left without a definition or description of what these good works should be....It simply will not do to understand the sanctified life or the third use of the law as simply refraining from sin....Rather it must be positively defined and understood as the performing of the good works of compassion and forgiveness.<sup>172</sup>

b. SHOULD SANCTIFICATION BE EXPRESSED ONLY AS AN INDICATIVE?

A small but vocal minority of Lutheran theologians and clergy are contending that preachers should speak of the Christian's life of sanctification only in terms of what "is" rather than what "should be." Stuempfle cautions that it is not sufficient only to "announce as clearly and

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<sup>171</sup>Scaer, "Preaching Sanctification," p. 3.

<sup>172</sup>Scaer, "Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions," pp. 178-79.

persuasively as we can all that God has done for us in Christ and then leave to the Holy Spirit the whole question of Christian obedience."<sup>173</sup> Osslund, however, proposes that preachers should express sanctification portions of the sermon only in the indicative. For example, instead of telling our people that we "should" be cheerful givers, he suggests that we rather tell them, "by God's grace we are."<sup>174</sup> However, the reality is that many of the people in the pew are not "cheerful" givers. They may or may not be "generous" givers, but there is no way of telling whether their giving is carried out reluctantly or cheerfully, no way of telling whether or not the Holy Spirit has already transformed this area of their Christian life. Therefore, the Gospel indicative needs to be expressed at times in the form of a Gospel exhortation or even a Gospel imperative, because the Christian life of sanctification is always in process.

Although Warneck quotes the "Formula of Concord" in regard to the necessity of using the Law to instruct the regenerate, he then softens that directive by suggesting that in preaching toward life goals we should not command or even urge the hearer "what is to be done and what he ought to do, but rather remind him who he is as a new creature in

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<sup>173</sup>Stuempfle, p. 63.

<sup>174</sup>Osslund, p. 9.



Christ."<sup>175</sup> In our preaching, he concludes, we should "proclaim the Gospel, tell your people who they are in Christ, and they will show you their new life in Him."<sup>176</sup> Schuessler similarly claims that the disciple of Christ needs no further knowledge or instruction in the faith beyond the clear proclamation of the Gospel in the sermon. He contends that "the new child of God knows what pleases the Father and does it."<sup>177</sup>

How much we ministers of the Gospel wish that our parishioners would give witness to their new life in Christ in a clear and consistent manner. But in many instances the evidence we see is sketchy at best. In most cases, I believe, the problem which diminishes their response to the Gospel is not that our church members are unregenerate. They know the Gospel. They believe the Gospel. Their trust is in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin, death and the power of Satan. But so often the evidence of their new life in Christ does not show forth very clearly or consistently in their everyday life or even in their attitudes and priorities in the life and ministry of the church.

There are, I feel, at least two major obstacles which hinder Christians from knowing what pleases their Heavenly

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<sup>175</sup>Warneck, p. 117.

<sup>176</sup>Warneck, p. 117.

<sup>177</sup>Paul E. Schuessler, "A Pastor's Reflection on Law and Gospel," Lutheran Forum 25:1 (February, 1991): 26.

Father and then doing his will. First of all, many "babes in the faith," including both new Christians and some veteran pew sitters, are woefully ignorant of God's will for their lives. By God's grace they may "desire" to "obey his commands and do what pleases him" (1 John 3:22). But like the people to whom John is writing in his first epistle, our people also need careful instruction as to what manner of life is pleasing to God and fruitful for their ministry. Often they are simply not aware of the helpful, spirit-filled guidelines which are sprinkled generously throughout the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament epistles.

Some who recognize this inconsistency between faith and practice in the lives of many Christians still contend that the pulpit is not the proper forum for sharing instruction and guidance for our Christian life. They suggest that Bible classes and discussion forums are more suitable for dealing with ethical questions of life and with matters pertaining to how we should live as Christians in the world. Jensen thus contends that we "need spend little time preaching the law as a guide to life."<sup>178</sup>

If it were true that the vast majority of our members participated regularly and faithfully in the reading and study of the Scriptures, we no doubt could devote less time in our sermons to Gospel application. But the sad reality

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<sup>178</sup>Jensen, p. 71.

is that in most congregations 80-90% of our people seldom or never attend a Bible class. Therefore, the sermon is the only forum we have in most cases to offer practical and specific instruction and guidelines from God's Word to assist our people in putting their faith into practice in ways that are pleasing to God and are fruitful for the building up of his kingdom. Growing Christians not only need to have their hearts and lives continually shaped and re-shaped by the Gospel, but also need to have their minds informed by the instruction God gives us in the Scriptures about the shape he desires for our life of Christian witness and service. For most of the people we serve, our best chance--and often our only chance--is through the medium of the message we deliver from the pulpit.

The second problem which hinders our people from knowing and doing the will of God faithfully and consistently is the basic problem we have discussed before, namely, our dual nature. Our old, sinful nature obstinately clings to our new, saintly nature, thus casting a shadow over and obscuring the revelation of God's good and perfect will. Scaer suggests that we should distinguish between the unbelieving part of Christians and the saintly part. The sinner part, he says, must continually be threatened with the Law, while the saintly part is "by its new nature" conforming to God's will. Regenerate man, he claims, "does not need to be told how he is to be related to God or to

other men, because he is by nature accomplishing all these things....For saints as saints there is no distinction between the indicative and the imperative."<sup>179</sup>

However, this side of eternity our sinner and saintly natures are hopelessly intertwined. In our messages from the pulpit we are always addressing "sinner-saints." We cannot simply appeal to the saintly side of Christians and ignore the sinner side. When we address the saints, we are always talking to "sinner-saints." Thus in every sermon we must not only preach the accusing finger of the Law and proclaim clearly the Good News of the Gospel, but we must also offer the sinner-saints in the pew careful instruction as to how they should walk--in response to the mercy and grace of Christ. Although we must emphasize over and over again that God's grace is free, we dare not imply that it is cheap. Sanctified sinners who have been purchased with the holy, precious blood of Christ will eagerly desire the guidance and encouragement of God's Word and will, so that they may bear rich and abundant fruit for the glory of God and the building up of his kingdom.

Therefore, it is most appropriate that we should be asking our people each week, in one form or another, to reflect on Peter's question, "What kind of people ought you to be?" (2 Peter 3:11). We need look no further than the

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<sup>179</sup>Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," pp. 185-86.

next verse for God's answer: "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:12). We must beware lest we fail to follow the Gospel indicative with Gospel application and exhortation, for otherwise we risk purveying "cheap grace."<sup>180</sup>

#### 4. THE DANGER OF ANTINOMIANISM

One side of the slippery slope of the role of sanctification in preaching, as we said, is to slide into legalism and moralism, where the application of the Gospel is seen as the proper and primary function of the sermon rather than as the fruit which flows from the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel must be the heart and soul and focus of every sermon. Since the time of John Calvin, the emphasis within the Reformed tradition has been on the instruction of the third use of the Law as the primary focus of the sermon. Calvin believed that the second use of the Law was only for the unregenerate. Therefore, he felt that using the Law as a guide for Christian living "was the proper use of the Law."<sup>181</sup> However, Calvin and others in the Reformed tradition went one ominous step further. They allowed and even encouraged the instruction of the Law in the sermon to

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<sup>180</sup>Lischer, "How Law and Gospel Work in Preaching," p. 5.

<sup>181</sup>Jensen, p. 70.

predominate over the proclamation of the Gospel. Scaer points out that "Luther's understanding of the law as God's foreign or alien work and of the Gospel as his real or proper work is reversed in Calvin's theology."<sup>182</sup>

As dangerous as that side of the slippery slope of sanctification is, we must be careful not to compensate so strongly in our Lutheran tradition that we slide over the other side into antinomianism, which advocates that there is no proper use for the Law in the life of the believer. In our preaching and teaching we must carefully steer the middle course between the legalism and moralism of the Reformed and the antinomianism of those, like Agricola in the 16th century, who claim that "repentance should be preached on the basis of the Gospel alone."<sup>183</sup>

We should be grateful that Luther lived until he had to face the great antinomian controversy of his day, led by John Agricola. Agricola first attacked the second use of the Law and later disparaged the third use also. Luther eventually realized that some of his earlier statements could be construed to reinforce the position of those who saw no purpose for the preaching of the Law to the regenerate, and so he spoke out strongly against the position of the antinomians. If Luther had died before

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<sup>182</sup>Scaer, "Sanctification in Lutheran Theology," p. 192.

<sup>183</sup>Ickert, p. 21.

1527, a case could have been made for considering him to be an antinomian himself. However, as we have shown before, the concept of the third use of the Law can be clearly documented from Luther's writings.

In his later years Luther explained and modified some of his previous exaggerated statements regarding the "uselessness" and "hurtfulness" of the Law, which Amsdorf and Agricola "used in support of...Antinomianism."<sup>184</sup> As Preus has documented, Luther's derogatory remarks about the Law "had only to do with its utter uselessness in achieving forgiveness and justification." Furthermore, as his Catechisms clearly indicate, Luther ascribed "great value to the Law in the governing of the Christian life."<sup>185</sup> Eugene Klug and Otto Stahlke also agree that "Those who deny that Luther, or the Lutheran Confessions, taught the Third Use of the Law have no leg to stand on."<sup>186</sup>

Nevertheless, contemporary Lutheran antinomians are still trying to deny that the Law has any positive informative and instructive function and purpose in the lives of Christians. However, to deny the validity of the third use of the Law serves to diminish the primacy and

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<sup>184</sup>Preus, p. 416.

<sup>185</sup>Preus, p. 416.

<sup>186</sup>Eugene F. Klug and Otto F. Stahlke, Getting into the Formula of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 48.

power of the Gospel. The first and second use of the Law ultimately point through and beyond the Gospel to a third use of the Law as a rule and guide for the believer. If we say that the Gospel rather than the Law informs a Christian how he ought to live, then we change the Gospel into a new Law, which serves to blur the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, thereby demeaning the priority and power of the Gospel.

In addition, the third use of the Law (Gospel application) has an important and distinctive purpose in the sermon because Christians remain sinner-saints throughout their earthly life. Therefore, they need ongoing instruction and guidance in discerning and following the will of God. Otherwise, they will devise their own solutions to the moral and ethical dilemmas they face. That could easily lead to the same chaotic results that occurred in the land of Israel in the days of the Judges when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6 RSV).

#### SECTION IV: THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF PREACHING

Our gracious God promises that when we faithfully proclaim his Word of grace and truth, it will accomplish his good and gracious will and purposes: "My word...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Is. 55:11). What



a precious privilege we preachers have week after week to lift high the cross of Christ, to proclaim the awesome promises of our great God and Savior and to point our hearers to Jesus Christ as the one and only way to eternal life. Our purpose from the pulpit is to paint a word picture for our people, based on the Word, which will by God's grace become a light shining in their hearts and minds that will reveal anew to them the wondrous "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Our ultimate purpose in preaching, therefore, is to offer our people each week the sure and confident hope, anchored in the Gospel of Christ, that they belong to Christ for time and for eternity. To be sure, they need to be reminded in no uncertain terms that their life of sanctification is woefully inadequate and always in process here on earth. But with even greater confidence and surety they must be told that God's perfect righteousness awaits us in heaven where our Lord will exchange all of the imperfections of our old, sinful nature for a new, glorified nature which will be ours through all eternity.

Thus we must continually assure the sinner-saints in the pew that the life-long struggle of the Christian to live with the tension of his dual nature is by no means a hopeless struggle. For the Christian always lives in hope, including both the assurance that he lives each day on earth

under the umbrella of Christ's righteousness, as well as the sure promise that our earthly struggles and troubles are preparing us for "an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:17). As long as we live here on earth, we are, Luther assures us, "A work that God has begun but not yet completed; but after death we shall be perfect, a divine work without sin or fault."<sup>187</sup>

In the meantime, we continually offer our people the blessed assurance that nothing in this life and not even death "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39). Ultimately, we can only stand in reverent awe and wonder with our people before God's mighty and merciful Word and marvel at the awe-inspiring love and wisdom of our great and gracious God and Savior:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has ever been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

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<sup>187</sup>Luther, Luther's Works vol. 32, p. 24.

## SECTION V: PARISH SEMINAR ON PREACHING

### A. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR PARISH PROJECT

When I attended Concordia Seminary in the 1960's, it was in vogue to disparage the value of the practical department in general and homiletics in particular. New and avant-garde ministries and ministry styles were the rage. We read that preaching was a dying art, that it could not compete with a new age of technology which was visually oriented. We were told that people would no longer sit still and listen for twenty minutes to a sermon. New and innovative methods of communication were going to be necessary in order to compete with a generation raised on television.

After more than twenty-five years in the pastoral ministry, however, I am convinced that there is no substitute for preaching as the primary vehicle for sharing God's life-giving and life-renewing word. I am convinced that what St. Paul refers to as "the foolishness of what was preached" (1 Cor. 1:21) is still "wiser than man's wisdom" (v. 25). The preaching and teaching of the Gospel continue to be the primary means through which our gracious God chooses "to save those who believe" (v. 21). Throughout my ministry I have consistently viewed preaching as the most significant task of my ministry, as well as my most fruitful opportunity to reach both members and non-members with the

saving message of the Gospel of Christ.

There are many challenges which the preacher of the Gospel faces every week in the pulpit. A primary challenge is to proclaim the Gospel clearly in every sermon, and not to be content only to talk about the Gospel or the application of the Gospel to the lives of the hearers. An equally critical challenge for the preacher is to properly distinguish in his message between the presentation of the Law and the proclamation of the Gospel. This is a particularly Lutheran insight, whose value must not only be accepted by the pastor, but also needs to be communicated clearly to the people in the pew. Without this proper balance of Law and Gospel in our preaching and teaching and understanding, we easily slip into legalism, on the one hand, where the preacher portrays the Christian faith as a set of rules to live by, or on the other hand, succumb to the tendency merely to talk about the Gospel without clearly proclaiming the Good News of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Even worse, some preachers hopelessly confuse Law and Gospel by twisting the Gospel into something we do instead of what God has done for us.

I have found a highly significant difference, for example, when comparing the daily devotions from Portals of Prayer, produced by Concordia Publishing House for The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the devotions from Our Daily Bread, produced by the "Radio Bible Class," which is

associated with the Reformed Church. In the Portals of Prayer there is almost always a clear statement of the Law, that is, God's righteous demands and our human failures; as well as a clear proclamation of the Gospel, that is, the Good News of the blessings which our Savior, Jesus Christ, earned for us through his suffering, death and resurrection. In Our Daily Bread there is considerable emphasis on God's righteous demands as well as on the efforts we must make toward righteous living. However, there is seldom ever a clear proclamation of the saving, life-changing power of the Gospel. These devotions sometimes talk about Christ and his will for our lives, but they seldom state clearly what he accomplished for us on the cross. They emphasize what we must do to please God (the Law), rather than what God has done for us and for our salvation (the Gospel).

As the members of our parishes hear more and more preaching and teaching on Christian radio and television which is either legalistic or distorts the message of the Gospel, our task is ever more important to rightly divide Law and Gospel in our preaching and teaching. This means, first of all, that we must use the accusing finger of the Law to arouse Christians from their self-righteousness and false piety, so that they will face up to the reality of their sin and guilt and then earnestly seek the comfort and consolation of the Gospel. However, repentant sinners must never be left to wallow in their guilt. Secondly and most

important, the Gospel of Christ must then be proclaimed with power and clarity in every sermon, assuring those who are contrite that their sins are fully forgiven by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we receive through our trusting faith in him.

A third challenge faced by the preacher, which has become an issue in the Missouri Synod in recent years, is whether or not it is necessary or even advisable to make clear from the pulpit the application or implications of the Gospel message for the spiritual life and growth of the hearers (what we traditionally have called "the third use of the Law"). Some say that when justification by faith is clearly proclaimed, then growth in sanctification will necessarily follow in the life of the believer, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they discourage any preaching of life goals, for fear that it will result in the development of synergistic or semi-pelagian concepts and beliefs among the hearers.

Others in the Missouri Synod, including myself, feel strongly that sinner-saints need the practical application of the Gospel to the situations which they face in their daily life. Our people need Gospel-motivated instruction and exhortation, following the example of St. Paul who urged his flock to "be imitators of God" (Eph. 5:1) and to "live as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). Although the power and motivation for our life of Christian love and service always

flow from the Gospel, I believe that God's people continue to need concrete direction and encouragement throughout their journey of faith, as they strive "in all things to grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

#### B. GOAL AND PURPOSE OF PROJECT SEMINAR

The primary challenge and focus of my project seminar is to assist the people in the pew to better understand and distinguish among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in the sermons they hear. ("Gospel application" is the term I have developed to express what we have generally referred to in Lutheran circles as "the third use of the Law" or the preaching of sanctification). I feel that the majority of parishioners, as well as many pastors, not only confuse Law and Gospel, but also fail to distinguish between the clear proclamation of the Gospel and the application of the Gospel to our Christian faith and life.

My project has two major divisions. The first division (Sections I-IV of this paper) is a summary of and reflection on my background reading on the importance of preaching, as well as the purpose and essential parts of a Christian sermon. In the first division I define those essential parts as God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application and then emphasize the importance of including each of them

clearly and distinctly, in proper balance, in every sermon.

This second division (Section V) revolves around the six-week seminar which I developed and field-tested with members of my congregation. The purpose of the seminar is to enable and equip the participants to be able to understand, recognize and distinguish among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application, particularly in the sermons they hear. A secondary purpose is to assist them in being able to discern those differences in the religious programming they see and hear, as well as in the religious material they read. After the completion of the seminar, I refined and revised the course materials so that they would be useful for me and other pastors for instructing the laity of the church in learning to discern these important theological distinctions, thereby encouraging them to live in the freedom of the Gospel, no longer "under law but under grace" (Rom. 5:15). In my conclusion, then, I offer some suggestions for the preaching ministry of the church.

#### C. UNDERLYING PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR PARISH PROJECT

My basic presuppositions underlying my project are as follows:

1. The Bible in its entirety is the inspired word of God, and is the sole source and norm of our Christian preaching and teaching.

2. People are brought into a right and saving



relationship with God, as a gift of his unmerited grace, through our trusting faith in Jesus Christ as our only Savior and Redeemer.

3. The Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people through the Gospel, which is the Good News of all of the blessings which our gracious Heavenly Father offers us, through the merit and mercy of his Son, Jesus Christ, including the blessings of forgiveness, new life and eternal salvation.

4. The primary purpose of preaching is to proclaim with clarity the saving and comforting message of the Gospel of Christ.

5. Christian preaching must also include the accusing finger of God's Law, which reveals people's sins and calls them to repentance and faith.

6. Sermons should also include clear and specific application of the Gospel to the lives of the believers, to guide them as they "grow up into...Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

#### D. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SIX-WEEK SEMINAR ON PREACHING

##### 1. PRELIMINARY CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

In preparation for the six-week seminar on preaching I developed a survey for the members of my congregation which focused on "Distinguishing Among God's Law, Gospel and Gospel Application" (Appendix 1). The survey asked for statistical information regarding sex, age, level of

education, length of membership in a Lutheran church, frequency of worship attendance, frequency of Bible class attendance, frequency of Bible reading and frequency of use of Portals of Prayer daily devotional booklets. The survey itself was introduced with clear and concise definitions of "God's Law," "The Gospel," and "Gospel application." There followed six Bible verses and six quotes from one of my recent sermons, including two of each that were expressions of God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application, in random order. The members were asked, on the basis of my definitions, to write beside each verse or quote an "L" if it reflected the commands of God's Law, a "G" if it stated the message of the Gospel, and an "A" if it were an application of the Gospel for our Christian growth.

The survey was passed out to all members during worship services on August 8, 1993. Ninety-five members completed the form. I consulted with Dr. David Groggel, Professor of Statistics at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, in regard to the development and evaluation of the information for statistical purposes. The purposes of the survey were to provide background information for my project as a whole, to provide information to guide me as I developed the six-week congregational seminar and to provide a base group for comparison with the participants in my seminar. Dr. Groggel provided me with a statistical formula (Appendix 2) by which I could measure the ability of the survey participants to

identify Law, Gospel and Gospel application in the Bible verses and sermon quotes, according to the eight categories. For statistical purposes we used a 5% level of significance, a common measurement of statistical significance.

My initial presupposition, before the survey was given, was that those who had been members of a Lutheran church for more than 10 years, those who worshipped regularly and those who attended Bible class regularly would perform better than those who had not. Another supposition I made was that those participants in the survey who were older (age 46 and older) and those who had less than a college education might not perform as well, because they might have more difficulty differentiating among theological concepts which were somewhat abstract. I also measured responses on the basis of the sex of the participants, as well as on how often they read the Bible and Portals of Prayer, although I conjectured that those areas would not show a significant statistical differential.

## 2. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF SURVEY: DEVELOPMENT AND INSIGHTS

For purposes of statistical analysis I selected one verse or quote that was Law, one that was Gospel and one that was Gospel application. For my analysis I selected the ones in each area for which there was the highest statistical variance. According to the statistical formula developed by Dr. Groggel, anytime "T" is greater than 3.84

it is considered to be a statistically significant category.

The Bible verse I chose which clearly expresses God's Law is, "There is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). 43 answered correctly (L), while 52 answered incorrectly (40-G and 12-A). The following are the correlations for each category for the Bible verse expressing the Law.

Sex: No statistical significance was indicated between the response of males (35) or females (60).

Age:  $T=4.27$ . Those who were 45 years of age or younger (41) answered this question correctly significantly more often than those who were 46 years of age and older (54).

Education Level:  $T=6.24$ . Those who had a college or graduate degree (48) answered this question correctly significantly more often than those who had less than a college degree (47).

Years as member of a Lutheran church: There was no statistical significance between those who were members of a Lutheran church 11 years or more (67) and those who were members 10 years or less (28).

Worship Attendance: No statistical significance was found between those who attend worship "almost every Sunday" (78) compared with those who attend less often (17).

Bible Class Attendance:  $T =13.62$ . There was a highly significant correlation in answering this question

correctly by those who attend a Bible class regularly at Immanuel (32) compared with those who attend irregularly or not at all (63).

Reading the Bible: There was no statistical significance between those who read the Bible "almost every day" (28) compared with those who read the Bible less often or not at all (67).

Reading Portals of Prayer: No statistical significance was indicated between those who read Portals of Prayer almost every day (37) compared with those who read the devotional booklet less often (58).

Combining two factors - Age and Level of Education:  $T=8.74$ . There was a highly significant correlation in answering correctly between those who were 45 years of age and younger and had a college or graduate degree (24), in comparison with those who were 46 years of age and older and had less than a college degree (33).

The sermon quote I selected which expresses the message of the Gospel clearly is: "God is a merciful God, who removes all of our sins from us for the sake of Christ." 74 participants answered correctly (G), and 19 answered incorrectly (8-L and 11-A). There were 2 invalid answers. The following are the correlations for each category for the sermon quote expressing the Gospel.

Age:  $T=10.28$ . Those who were 45 years of age or

younger answered this question correctly with a highly significant correlation.

Education level:  $T=5.13$ . Those with a college or graduate degree answered this question correctly significantly more often than those who had less than a college degree.

Age and education level combined:  $T=11.44$ . Those participants ages 45 or younger who had a college or graduate degree answered this question with a highly significant correlation. In fact, all 23 in this category answered this question correctly.

In none of the other six categories was there a significant statistical correlation.

The Bible verse I selected which expresses the application of the Gospel clearly is: "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Eph. 2:10). 55 participants answered correctly (A), and 38 answered incorrectly (33-G and 5-L). There were 2 invalid answers. The following are the correlations for each category for the Bible verse expressing Gospel application.

Bible class attendance:  $T=5.59$ . Those who attend a Bible class regularly at Immanuel answered this question correctly significantly more than those who do not attend a Bible class regularly.

In none of the other seven categories was there a significant statistical correlation.

My conclusions based on the statistical analysis are as follows. First of all, the participants in my class were able to distinguish Bible verses and sermon quotes which were expressions of Law and Gospel more clearly than those expressing Gospel application. From the responses of the members of my class, as well as the statistics, I have concluded that the distinction between Gospel application and either Law or Gospel is not as clear or easy to discern as the distinction between Law and Gospel.

Secondly, my presupposition was valid that age and education level would be significant factors in the ability of the participants to distinguish among Law, Gospel and Gospel application. When these categories were combined, those age 45 or younger with a college education correctly identified the Law and Gospel quotes with significantly greater frequency than the other participants. There was no significant variable, however, in distinguishing the Gospel application quote.

Thirdly, my presupposition was correct that Bible class attendance would be a significant factor in correctly distinguishing the quotations. There was a highly significant correlation for those attending a Bible class regularly at Immanuel in identifying the Law quotation, and a significant correlation in identifying the Gospel application quote correctly. There was no significant variable in regard to the Gospel quote.

Fourthly, my presupposition that those who had been members of a Lutheran church more than ten years and those who attend worship regularly would perform better than the other respondents proved to be invalid. There was no significant statistical correlation in these or any of the other categories for any of the Biblical or sermon quotes.

There are at least two significant insights, I believe, from this statistical analysis. First of all, in our ministry we must stress the importance of our members attending Bible class regularly. Bible class participation is a significant factor in promoting spiritual growth and theological maturity among our people. Secondly, in our preaching and teaching we must take into account the fact that the grasping of certain theological concepts may be due more to factors such as age or level of education or intellectual ability than they are to due to the length of membership in a Lutheran church or the frequency of attendance at worship.

I would suggest, therefore, that we need to make sure that we proclaim Law and Gospel clearly and simply week after week from the pulpit, as well as in our Bible classes. We need to use language levels and theological concepts which are within the ability of all of our members to grasp and take to heart. That doesn't mean we should not keep on challenging our people to grow to maturity in their faith and their knowledge of God's Word and promises. But it does



mean that we must strive always to express the Gospel in words that all of the children of God, including "babes in the faith," can receive and take to heart with clarity of understanding, as well as with joy and thanksgiving.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEMINAR

My goal was to select approximately fifteen members of my congregation, representing a cross-section of the membership, who would commit themselves to participate in the six-week seminar on preaching. I sent letters to twenty-five members, inviting them to participate. Fifteen members accepted the invitation. Eleven of them participated fully in the seminar. Eleven seemed to be a good class size for encouraging discussion. They included six females and five males; eight who were 45 years of age or younger; six who had a college degree; and six who had been members of a Lutheran church for ten years or less.

I developed a broad course outline for the six weeks, which I revised each week based on insights gained and questions raised during the previous week's session. The weekly sessions included a Bible study related to preaching in general, as well as passages relating to the weekly focus, i.e., God's Law, the Gospel, the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, Gospel application, etc. The sessions also included an inductive study of the sermon from the previous week, focusing primarily on discovering and

distinguishing among Law, Gospel and Gospel application in the sermon. The discussion was based on the sermon evaluation form (Appendix # 3) which each participant filled out each weekend during or immediately after the service and then placed on my desk. I would review their responses each week in preparation for the Wednesday class. I attempted to offer some positive reinforcement by emphasizing answers that correctly identified the sin or problem, the Gospel message and the application of the Gospel in the sermon. Each session also included deductive material relating to understanding the purpose, development and three chief parts of the sermon. (The extensive class outline for each session may be found in Appendices # 4-9.)

I also developed two pre-test surveys (Appendices 10-11), which the participants filled out at the beginning of the first session. I had them fill out the same surveys at the end of the final session, as a post-test, to measure any change in their understanding of and ability to distinguish among Law, Gospel and Gospel application. During the final session the participants also filled out the same survey that had been given to the congregation in August (Appendix 1), in order to make statistical comparisons between the responses of the class participants and those of the congregation as a whole.

## E. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SEMINAR

### 1. EVALUATION OF SEMINAR BY PARTICIPANTS

At the end of our sixth session the participants filled out an unsigned seminar evaluation form (Appendix 12), which yielded significant insights into the value of the course. The first question asked what had been learned or learned more clearly in the seminar. The most common response related to the appropriate content of a sermon; namely, that a sermon should include and contrast Law and Gospel, and also contain Gospel application. Several said that the distinction among Law, Gospel and Gospel application was a new concept for them.

Another new insight for some was the necessity to relate the application in the sermon both to the Gospel (the power source) as well as the Law (the guidelines for their life). A lifelong Missouri Synod Lutheran commented that she had always been taught about Law and Gospel, but Gospel application or the third use of the Law was a new concept to her. Two of the class members emphasized that the grace of God and the message of the Gospel were much clearer and more meaningful to them as a result of the seminar. Another revelation for some of the participants was simply their growth in understanding and appreciation of the complexity and order of the process the pastor goes through in developing a sermon, from initial study to delivery.

The second question asked the participants what they

were still unclear about in regard to distinguishing among Law, Gospel and Gospel application. Two-thirds of them expressed some confusion in regard to distinguishing Gospel application from the Law or the Gospel. One wrote, "Sometimes the Law and application can be close to the same and difficult to distinguish." Another wrote, "I still get confused about what is actually God's Gospel, showing us our Savior and salvation, and what is application, showing us our life of service." From their responses in class, however, I am confident that the participants were able to come to a much clearer understanding of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, which is a key insight for Christians, for their growth in faith as well as their growth in their life of sanctification.

Two of the participants noted, however, that it is difficult to identify some Bible verses as clear expressions of Law or Gospel or Gospel application, because many verses include more than one of these expressions. For example, Ephesians 2:10 is primarily Gospel application, "We are God's workmanship created...to do good works." However, the Gospel is also expressed in the words, "created in Christ Jesus," which helps to make clear that the power for our life of good works flows from the Gospel and is created by Christ. Another example would be Ephesians 5:8, "Live as children of light," which is primarily Gospel application (third use of the Law). This verse encourages God's

children to let the light of Christ shine through them. However, because the Law always has an accusatory function, such a guideline can arouse guilt in the believer who has not been living in the light or has not been faithful in reflecting the light of Christ to others. Thus this verse could also serve the second use of the Law, driving the believer back to the Gospel for forgiveness and comfort and strength.

As I noted earlier, there is a fine line at times between the second and third use of the Law. Sometimes a Bible verse or section in a sermon will express to one believer God's guidelines which flow from the Gospel, while another will hear the accusatory word of the Law. In addition, there is a fine line at times between the expression of the Gospel, what God has accomplished for us through Christ, and the new life in Christ which flows from the Gospel. For example, in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, Paul shares the Good News that "God has reconciled us to himself through Christ," followed immediately by the application for the Christian life, stating the challenge that God has "given us the ministry of reconciliation."

Another insight came from a deep thinker in the class who commented, "It seems as though Gospel application must always include methodology in addition to delineating the Law's requirements." In other words, Gospel application cannot stand by itself as a list of rules and requirements

for the Christian to live by, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, creating and nurturing faith through the Gospel. That is one reason why I believe the term "Gospel application" is preferable to the traditional term, "the third use of the Law." The power and strength which enable us to grow in our life of sanctification and to "live as children of light" do not come from God's righteous demands, but only from "the love of Christ which compels us, because we are convinced that...he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

The third question on the evaluation form asked what was the most helpful part of the seminar. Four people said that as a result of their participation they now listen more closely to the sermon. One person commented, "In church it has been easier to follow the sermon because I have been listening for Law and application." Another spoke of "'seeing' a new way to listen to a sermon." Filling out the sermon evaluation form during or immediately after the sermon was also felt to be a helpful tool for discovering and focusing on the Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in each sermon. Two participants commented that one of the most helpful parts of the seminar was the one word definitions for Law, Gospel and Gospel application, such as "Illness, cure and medicine," that were presented and discussed during the opening and closing sessions. Several

of the participants seemed to latch onto those "handles" as helpful ways of remembering and recognizing the shades of difference between Law and Gospel, Law and Gospel application and Gospel and Gospel application.

Question four asked for suggestions for teaching the seminar another time. Three participants suggested expanding the course from six to eight sessions so that there would be more time available for discussing the evaluations of the Sunday sermons, for class discussion, and for meeting in small groups. Another suggestion was that the participants might watch some videotaped sermons and then discuss them together in class. I had actually planned to do that a couple weeks, but ran out of time. Two people suggested expanding the final week's project of preparing a sermon outline to "putting together an actual sermon as a class project." Another commented that writing a sermon "could have been quite enlightening as a homework assignment."

The fifth question asked whether they had a significantly better grasp of the distinction among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application after the completion of the seminar. All of them said "yes," although one commented that she "still had a little difficulty distinguishing between Gospel and Gospel application," while another admitted still having some difficulty distinguishing between Law and Gospel application.

The final question asked whether or not they felt they would benefit more from the sermons they heard, after participating in the seminar. Once again they all answered "yes." One person said, "I subconsciously caught myself wondering if the sermon was Law, Gospel or Gospel application. It was a very good course." Another remarked, "Before I tended to focus in on the problems and the illustrations. Now I am aiming my focus on the promise and the pathway." Another commented, "This was an excellent seminar, and one that has actually brought me closer to Christ. I can now see how a sermon convicts, saves and shows us how to live. By knowing that, it gives me a clearer understanding of God and his plan of salvation." An interesting suggestion from one of the participants was that the preacher should actually identify in the sermon when he is preaching Law and when he is proclaiming Gospel. Doing that, she said, "may help the rest of the congregation understand these concepts better, and better grasp the sermon message."

## 2. EVALUATION OF GROWTH OF SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

The eleven participants in the seminar took a pre-course survey at the beginning of the first class, and then took the same survey at the conclusion of the final session. The portion of the survey in which they defined God's Law, the Gospel and the application of the Gospel in



their own words, proved to be statistically significant. Another pastor, who is a 1991 graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, graded each answer on a scale of 1-5, based on the definitions contained in the congregational survey. The total score for each participant could range from 0-15. Five of the participants showed a significant increase in their understanding of Law, Gospel and Gospel application, from an average score of 7 on the pre-course survey, to an average of 11 on the post-course survey. Another five class members showed even greater growth in their comprehension of the concepts of Law, Gospel and Gospel application. They scored an average of 4 out of 15 on the pre-course and increased to an average of 12 out of 15 on the identical post-course survey. Thus ten out of eleven of the participants showed a significant growth in their comprehension of the basic concepts of the course.

During the final session, after completing the post-course surveys, each participant was asked to complete the same congregational questionnaire that had been filled out in August by ninety-five members of the congregation, serving as the control group. I compared the answers of the seminar participants with the control group, using the same statistical formula developed by Dr. Groggel. For comparison purposes I used the same three quotes we had utilized for my previous statistical analysis. I found that there was a significantly higher proportion of correct

answers by members of my class for the two quotes expressing the Law and the Gospel. Class members did not respond significantly better in regard to the quote expressing the application of the Gospel. Nine out of eleven of the participants in the seminar correctly identified Romans 3:10 as Law, while forty-three out of ninety-five in the control group identified it correctly. The Gospel quote was identified correctly by all eleven members of the class, while seventy-four out of ninety-five in the congregational survey made the correct identification. This survey, therefore, indicated the value of the course in helping the participants to understand, recognize and identify the Law and the Gospel, and to a lesser degree the application of the Gospel, in Bible verses and sermon quotations.

### 3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SEMINARS

I have incorporated the comments and suggestions from the seminar evaluations, along with other observations and reflections from each session, in my revisions of the class outlines for the six sessions (Appendices 13-18). I feel that these class outlines are in a format that could be utilized by another pastor in his own congregation. In addition, I have summarized my reflections on and suggestions for each session as a teacher's guide for future seminars (Appendices 19-24). Those summaries include a variety of suggestions. My recommendations include:

1. Spending more class time comparing daily devotions from booklets produced by our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with those from the Reformed tradition. Recognizing Law, Gospel and Gospel application is generally easier in a brief devotion than in a lengthy sermon.

2. Using more class time for reviewing the sermon from the previous Sunday. That might include passing back the participants' sermon evaluation forms and sharing more of their responses.

3. Doing more practice exercises in class, using Bible verses and quotations from sermons or devotional booklets, to aid the participants in recognizing and distinguishing among Law, Gospel and Gospel application.

4. Taking time in class to watch and then evaluate at least two sermons on video, one by the class leader, and one a model sermon from a course on preaching. There are dynamics involved in the preaching of a sermon which do not always register on the printed page.

5. Expanding the course from six to eight sessions would be helpful in order to cover the material more adequately and to allow more time for discussion.

6. Setting aside portions of two sessions, as well as preparation time at home, for the outlining and composing of a complete sermon. I would suggest dividing the class into small groups of 4-5 participants for working on this project.

## F. CONCLUSIONS FROM SEMINAR ON PREACHING

After analyzing the statistics from the congregational survey and then leading the six-week seminar, I am more convinced than ever of the need for educating the members of our congregations in the fundamentals of the faith, which we often assume they understand. However, the reality is that the theological truths we preach and teach are often misunderstood or missed altogether by the people in the pew or in the Bible class. Even basic concepts such as Law and Gospel, which we assume our members comprehend, are often misunderstood or confused by them.

Some of that education must take place from the pulpit, as well as in the regular, weekly Bible classes. I am also convinced of the value of offering a seminar such as this for the members of the parish at least once or twice a year. It would be valuable not only for the participants' growth in faith and knowledge, but it would also provide valuable insights and feedback for the preacher and teacher. For we are not dealing here with trivial matters. As Walther concluded in his fourth thesis on Law and Gospel: "The true knowledge of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is not only a glorious light, affording the correct understanding of the entire holy Scriptures, but without this knowledge Scripture is and remains a sealed book."<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup>Walther, p. 1.

Appendix 1D

(Congregational Questionnaire Continued from front page)

E. I attend worship:  Almost every Sunday  
 About twice a month  About once a month  
 Occasionally

F. I attend a Bible class at Immanuel:  
 Regularly during most of the year  
 Not currently, but have attended one within the past 5 years  
 I usually do not attend a Bible class

G. I read the Bible:  Almost every day  
 Occasionally  Seldom  Never

H. I read "Portals of Prayer" devotional booklets:  
 Almost every day  Occasionally  
 Seldom  Never

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Pastor Duchow will be leading a 6-week seminar on preaching, Tuesdays from 7:00-8:30 p.m., from September 21-October 26. If you might be interested in participating in the seminar, please sign up on his office door or let him know of your interest.

Appendix 1A

CONGREGATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Pastor Duchow requests your help in gathering information for his parish project on preaching, which he is completing for his Doctor of Ministry program at Concordia Seminary. Please take a couple minutes to fill out the statistical information on the front and back of this sheet. Then kindly complete the survey on the inside of the sheet, following the directions that are given. Please do not sign your name.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Please check the appropriate line in each section.

A.  Female  Male

B. Age Range:  12-18 years  19-30  31-45  
 46-60  61-75  over 75

C. Education (Check highest level attained):  
 High School diploma or GED  College Degree  
 Graduate Degree  Vocational Training

D. How long have you been a member of a Lutheran church?  
 Less than 2 years  2-5 years  
 6-10 years  11-20 years  
 20-40 years  More than 40 years

(QUESTIONNAIRE CONTINUED ON BACK)

Appendix 1B

DISTINGUISHING AMONG GOD'S LAW, GOSPEL  
AND GOSPEL APPLICATION

God's LAW is the commands and demands by which God reveals to us His will for our lives. The Law's primary purpose is to serve as a mirror, showing us our sin and its consequences, and calling us to repentance.

The GOSPEL is the Good News of the blessings of God's forgiveness and new life and salvation which Jesus Christ earned for us on the cross, when He defeated the powers of sin and death and satan.

GOSPEL APPLICATION is the implications of the Gospel for living out our faith in our daily life. The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel to enable us and empower us to put our faith into practice. GOSPEL APPLICATION is God's instruction for guiding Christians in their life-long process of Christian growth.

The following are 6 Bible verses and 6 quotes from a recent sermon by Pastor Duchow. Using the above 3 definitions, please put beside each quote an "L" if it reflects the commands of God's Law, a "G" if it states the message of the Gospel, and an "A" if it is an application of the Gospel for our daily life and growth.

\_\_\_\_\_ "The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

\_\_\_\_\_ "Live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

\_\_\_\_\_ "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

\_\_\_\_\_ "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10).

Appendix 1C

(Distinguishing Among God's Law, Gospel and Gospel  
Application Continued)

\_\_\_\_\_ "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

\_\_\_\_\_ "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, ....it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

\_\_\_\_\_ "God is a merciful God, who removes all of our sins from us for the sake of Christ."

\_\_\_\_\_ "God commands us, 'You shall be holy as I the Lord your God am holy.'"

\_\_\_\_\_ "Moved by the love of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we strive to live a life that is pleasing to God."

\_\_\_\_\_ "Having received the good gifts and blessings of our Lord, we cannot be satisfied with anything less than living according to God's standards."

\_\_\_\_\_ "There are far-reaching consequences when people go against God's Word and will."

\_\_\_\_\_ "God has changed us from enemies into friends, through the reconciliation which Christ accomplished for us on the cross."

## Appendix 2A

Statistical Formula Developed by Dr. David Groggel,  
Professor of Statistics, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

According to the following example: Eighty people are chosen and classified according to whether or not they could correctly identify a concept as Law or Gospel and as to whether they were regular or infrequent in church attendance. Use the results below to see if church attendance affects the ability to correctly identify Law and Gospel concepts.

		Choice of Law or Gospel		
		Correct	Wrong	
Church Attendance	Regular	50 (41.25)	5 (13.75)	55 (55)
	Infrequent	10 (18.75)	15 ( 6.25)	25 (25)
		60 (60)	20 (20)	80 (80)

The numbers in parentheses are the expected frequencies. Note that they also sum to give the same row and column totals as the observed frequencies. What we are really doing is comparing the information we actually observed to what that information should look like if the data perfectly supported the independence of the two variables. If the observed are close to the expected, then T will be small and we will not dispute the fact that the two variables are independent. If at least some of the observed are significantly different from the expected, then T will be large and we will reject independence and conclude that the variables are dependent.

In this case we wish to test:

H<sub>0</sub> : Ability to identify Law and Gospel concepts does not depend on church attendance

H<sub>a</sub> : Ability to identify Law and Gospel concepts does depend on church attendance

$$T = \frac{(50 - 41.25)^2}{41.25} + \frac{(5 - 13.75)^2}{13.75} + \frac{(10 - 18.75)^2}{18.75} + \frac{(15 - 6.25)^2}{6.25}$$

$$T = 1.856 + 5.568 + 4.083 + 12.25 + 23.757 > 3.84$$

Thus, at the 5% level of significance we can conclude that the ability to correctly identify Law and Gospel concepts does depend on the frequency of church attendance (we reject H<sub>0</sub> and conclude H<sub>a</sub> is true).

## Appendix 2B

Note: When  $T < 3.84$  we do not conclude  $H_0$  is true. The correct way to state the conclusion in these cases is to say that the data does not support the hypothesis that the two variables are dependent. We do not really conclude  $H_0$  or  $H_a$  is true in these cases; we just say there is not enough evidence to reject  $H_0$  in favor of  $H_a$ .

### COMPARISON OF TWO CATEGORICAL VARIABLES (Chi-Square Test for Independence)

Responses are gathered for a group of  $n$  people. Each person is classified according to two variables, each variable having two categories. The resulting data will look like:

		Variable 1		
		Category 1	Category 2	
Variable 2	Category 1	$X_1$	$X_2$	$R_1 = X_1 + X_2$
	Category 2	$X_3$	$X_4$	$R_2 = X_3 + X_4$
		$C_1 = X_1 + X_3$	$C_2 = X_2 + X_4$	$n$

We wish to test the hypotheses:

$H$  : The two variables are independent

$H$  : The two variables are dependent

Independence implies that the category a person is classified into according to variable 1 in no way affects the category they are classified into according to variable 2, and dependence implies it does.



## Appendix 2C

We calculate a statistic, call it  $T$ , that will help us decide, based on the observed data in the table, which hypothesis is true. To do this, we will need to calculate the number of responses in each cell of the table that we would expect to see if  $H_0$  was true. We call these the expected frequencies and will denote them for this case by  $E_1$ ,  $E_2$ ,  $E_3$  and  $E_4$ . The values  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ ,  $X_3$ , and  $X_4$  are called the observed frequencies. The general form of the expected frequencies is:

$$\frac{(\text{row total})(\text{column total})}{n}$$

which in our case would give us:

$$E_1 = \frac{(R_1)(C_1)}{n} \quad E_2 = \frac{(R_1)(C_2)}{n} \quad E_3 = \frac{(R_2)(C_1)}{n} \quad E_4 = \frac{(R_2)(C_2)}{n}$$

The statistic  $T$  is then calculated as:

$$T = \frac{(X_1 - E_1)^2}{E_1} + \frac{(X_2 - E_2)^2}{E_2} + \frac{(X_3 - E_3)^2}{E_3} + \frac{(X_4 - E_4)^2}{E_4}$$

We will reject  $H_0$  and conclude that  $H_a$  is true at the 5% level of significance if  $T > 3.84$ .

SERMON EVALUATION FORM

DIRECTIONS:

1. Please complete this sheet and leave on my desk after the service.
2. Please try to respond to each question in one or two sentences.

- A. What was the central thought of the sermon?
- B. What was the primary sin or problem that the preacher addressed in the sermon?
- C. What was the Gospel message (the Good News of the blessings which God has shared with us through Christ) that the preacher related to the sin or problem?
- D. What application or implications of the Gospel did the preacher share for living out our faith in our daily life?
- E. What message or insight or illustration in the sermon today was especially meaningful or helpful for you?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Hamilton, Ohio  
September 21 - October 26 1993

++++  
First Session: September 21

A. A time to get acquainted

B. Opening Devotion: "The Foolishness of Preaching"  
Based on 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

1. Prayer and Introduction.
2. Why do some people consider the message of the cross to be foolishness? (v. 18).
3. What is the message and meaning of the cross?  
(Read Romans 1:16).
4. Why was the preaching of Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews? (v. 23).
5. Why did that message seem like foolishness to the Gentiles?
6. What does Paul mean when he says that God chose the foolish and weak things of this world to shame the wise and the strong?  
(v. 27).
7. On what did Paul resolve to focus his preaching and ministry?  
(1 Cor. 2:2).

C. Overview of 6-week Seminar

1. Each week there will be lecture and discussion on some aspect of preaching, focusing especially on recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel Application in the sermon.
2. Each participant is asked to fill out a sermon evaluation form immediately after the service each weekend and leave it on my desk.
3. Each week we will study and evaluate a sermon (usually the one from the previous Sunday), focusing especially on recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel Application.

4. Some weeks we will evaluate some daily devotions from Portals of Prayer and other devotional booklets, in terms of how they present or omit God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel Application.

5. Particular emphasis for each week:

Week 2: a. The three uses of God's Law.

b. Distinguishing between Law and Gospel

Week 3: a. The message, power and proclamation of the Gospel.

b. Distinguishing between the Gospel and Gospel application.

Week 4: a. The content and function of Gospel application in the sermon.

b. What the preaching of sanctification can and cannot do.

Week 5: a. We will divide into small groups, with each group developing a sermon outline based on a common text, focusing on God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in the text and sermon outline.

Week 6: a. Discussion of the vitality, purpose and power of preaching.

b. Discussion and evaluation of a model sermon.

c. Summary and evaluation of seminar.

D. Pre-Course Survey (3 sections, including congregational survey)

E. Six Underlying Presuppositions for our Seminar on Preaching.

a. The Bible in its entirety is the inspired Word of God, and is the only source and norm of our Christian preaching and teaching.

b. People are brought into a right and saving relationship with God as a gift of His unmerited grace, through our trusting faith in Jesus Christ as our only Savior and Redeemer.

c. The Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people through the Gospel, which is the Good News of all of the blessings which our gracious Heavenly Father offers us, through the merit and mercy of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Gospel assures us that those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior receive His precious gifts of forgiveness, new life and eternal salvation.

d. The primary purpose of preaching is to proclaim with clarity the saving and comforting message of the Gospel of Christ.

e. Christian preaching also includes the accusing finger of the Law, which reveals people's sins and calls them to repentance.

f. Sermons should also include clear and specific application of the Gospel to the faith and life of the believers, to guide them as they "grow up into...Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

F. Understanding the Meaning and Significance of the Three Parts of the Sermon.

1. God's Law
  
2. The Gospel
  
3. The Application of the Gospel

G. An Exercise in Recognizing God's Law, the Gospel, and Gospel Application in devotions from Portals of Prayer, Christ In Our Home, and Daily Bread. (May be used as homework assignment).

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do all of the devotions include the accusing finger of God's Law (the 2nd use of the Law)? Which, if any, do not?
  
2. Which devotions do not contain a specific presentation of the message of the Gospel? Why not?
  
3. Are there any devotions which do not mention the name of Jesus Christ? Why not?
  
4. Are there some devotions which have little or no application of the Gospel to our faith or daily life (3rd use of the Law)? Why not?

H. An exercise in Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon Pastor Duchow Preached on September 19, 1993: "Sinner, Saint and Servant."

1. Underline or note in margin the clearest statements of:
  - a. The accusing finger of the Law
  - b. The message of the Gospel of God's love in Christ.
  - c. The Application of the Gospel to our faith and life.
  
2. Which of the 3 parts of the sermon is presented most clearly?
  
3. Which of the 3 parts of the sermon needs strengthening?

I. Concluding Remarks and Assignment

1. Sermon evaluation forms to be filled out the next 5 Sundays.
  
2. Read the Portals of Prayer devotion for each day of the week, underlining or marking in the margin a reference to God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

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Second Session: September 28, 1993

I. Opening Devotion: The Impact of God's Law

A. God Demand.

1. Read Leviticus 19:2 and Matthew 5:48.

a. What does God demand of His people?

b. Who can keep these commands?

c. What is the consequence for someone who honestly tries to be perfectly holy?

2. Read James 2:10 and Galatians 3:10

a. How much leeway does God allow His followers in regard to His demand to obey His Law?

b. For those like the Pharisees, who have a religion based on keeping the Laws of God, what is the end result?

B. The Problem

1. Read Psalm 51:5.

a. What is the root of the problem in our relationship with God?

2. Read Ecclesiastes 7:20 and Romans 3:10

a. How many people are righteous in the eyes of God?

3. Read Romans 3:20.

b. How can we achieve a righteousness that is pleasing to God?

C. The Diagnosis

1. Read Romans 3:23.

a. What is our spiritual diagnosis?

2. Read Romans 6:23a (First half of verse).

a. What do we deserve because of our sin?

3. Read Ephesians 2:1.

a. How serious is our spiritual illness?

Appendix 5B

D. The Cure (The Good News of the Gospel)

1. Read Romans 6:23b.

a. What is God's offer to us who are spiritually dead?

2. Read Romans 3:21,22,24.

a. What did God do to provide the cure for us?

b. Who is able to receive the cure?

3. Read 1 John 1:7-9.

a. What do we need to do in order to be able to receive God's cure?

4. Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

a. What do we have to do in order to earn or deserve God's cure?

b. Who must receive all the honor and glory for our cure?

II. Review of and response to surveys from previous week.

A. Pre-Course Survey - Page 1

1. Two answers focused on the demands of God for holiness--what He wants us to do and not to do.

2. Four referred to the 10 Commandments (Old Testament).

3. Two answers centered on God's Law as rules or guidelines for our lives.

4. One viewed it as an introduction to God's love.

B. Pre-Course Survey - Page 2

1. Seven matched the three phrases correctly.

2. Two gave written responses which were partially correct.

3. Two matched God's Law with God's will for our daily living (The 3rd use of the Law).

III. Presentation and Discussion on God's Law

A. What is God's Law?

B. The Three Uses of the Law.

1. A fence or curb on sin.

a. What broad purpose does God's Law serve in the world?

b. How is God's Law like a fence for the Christian?

c. What is the purpose of the fence of God's Law and Commandments for the Christian?

2. A Mirror to show us our sin.

a. What do you see when you first look into a mirror in the morning when you get up?

b. How does God's Law function as a mirror for the Christian?

c. What do many non-Christians think they see when they look into the mirror of God's Commandments?

d. What does 1 John 1:8-10 have to say about the importance of being honest with ourselves and honest with God about our sin?

e. How should we respond when we look into the mirror of God's Law?

3. A Guide for our life

a. Why does the Christian desire to use God's laws and commands as a guideline for his life?

b. How important is our motivation for wanting to please God and to follow His will?

c. Can a non-Christian use God's commands as a loving guideline for his life in the same way a Christian does?

d. How closely can sincere Christians follow God's guidelines for their life?



e. The "Third Use of the Law" is sometimes referred to as "Our life of sanctification," "Gospel Application," or "Gospel Implications." Which of these would be most helpful for you in understanding and expressing what we mean when we speak of God's Law in terms of His loving guidelines for the life of the Christian?

Can you think of another phrase that would be helpful?

C. Further Discussion of the purpose and use of God's Law

1. Which of the three is the most important use of God's Law?

2. Why do you think so?

3. Which use of the Law is most important in the sermon? Why?

4. Does the second use of the Law in the sermon serve a different function for hearers who are non-believers and believers?

a. If so, what is the difference?

b. Is it correct to say that "God's Law always accuses"?

5. How do "Holiness" churches differ from the Lutheran Church in their approach to and use of God's Law?

a. What is the primary way in which God's Law is used in many "Holiness" and "Fundamentalist" churches?

b. Why is this approach so appealing to many people?

c. What is the problem with thinking in terms of our Christian life in terms of living in a fenced-in area, surrounded by God's laws and commands?

d. What would be a more helpful image or analogy for picturing our Christian life?

IV. Evaluation of sermon from September 19, focusing on recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and the application or implications of the Gospel.

A. What was the central thought of the sermon?

B. What was the primary sin or problem addressed in the sermon?

1. Where was it addressed in the sermon?

C. What was the Gospel message that the preacher related to the sin or problem?

1. Where is it found in the sermon?

D. What application or implications of the Gospel did the preacher share for the faith and life of the Christian?

1. Where is it found in the sermon?

E. Which of the three parts of the sermon was presented most clearly and adequately?

F. Were any of the three parts presented unclearly or inadequately?

V. If time, evaluate the sermon from September 26, using the same questions?

VI. If time, discuss the participants' responses to the daily devotions that they evaluated during the week.

VI. Questions, Conclusions and Assignment.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

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Third Session: October 5, 1993

I. Devotional Bible Study based on Matthew 5 and Ephesians 2.

A. Matthew 5 (From Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount")

1. Are the Beatitudes of Jesus (vs. 3-12) primarily Law or Gospel? Why do you think so?

2. Is the section on Salt and Light (vs. 13-16) primarily Law, Gospel or Gospel application?

3. Is the rest of the chapter primarily Law, Gospel, or Gospel application?

4. Who can fulfill the demands of verses 20 and 48?

a. What hope then do we have?

5. Is the message of the Gospel explicit or implicit in this chapter?

B. Ephesians 2:1-10

1. Are verses 1-3 an expression of the Law, the Gospel or Gospel application? What words or phrases indicate that?

2. Are verses 4-7 Law, Gospel or Gospel application? What words express that most clearly?

3. Verses 8-10 contains one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of God's plans and purposes for His people?

a. How clearly is the accusing finger of the Law expressed?

b. Where in verses 1-10 is the accusing finger of the Law clearly expressed?

c. With what words is the message of the Gospel proclaimed?

d. How clear is the message of the Gospel in vs. 8-10?

e. What words express the application of the Gospel to the life of the Christian?

II. Review sections not covered in Session 2.

A. (Page 4 - Question 5): "How do 'Holiness' churches differ from the Lutheran Church in their approach to and use of God's Law?"

B. (Page 5 - Section IV): "Evaluation of sermon from September 19, focusing on recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and the application of the Gospel."

III. Presentation and Discussion on The Gospel.

A. What is the Gospel?

1. How would you define The Gospel to someone who didn't know much about the Christian faith?

2. What Bible verse is sometimes called "The Gospel in a nutshell?"

B. The Good News of the Gospel.

1. Why is the Gospel "Good News" for the believer in Christ?

2. What blessings and promises does God offer us through the Gospel?

3. How is the Gospel like God's medicine and cure for the sickness of sin?

4. How often do we need to hear the proclamation and message of the Gospel? Why?

5. What are we to do with the message of the Gospel? (cf. Matthew 28:18-20)?

C. The Power of the Gospel.

1. What is the source of the Gospel's power?

2. How powerful is the Gospel of Christ? (cf. Romans 1:16, including Greek word for "power"--"dunamis").

Appendix 6C

3. A well-known preacher wrote, "A Christ-centered, Gospel-rich sermon is a living organism." What did he mean by that statement?

4. How does God work through the Gospel in the heart and life of the believer?

D. What words or phrases or images does the Bible use to express the message and meaning of the Gospel?

1. How can the preacher be creative in his expression of the Gospel, instead of resorting simply to using common "cliches"?

2. Can you think of any fresh and creative words or ways to express the message and meaning of the Gospel?

E. Proclaiming the Gospel clearly.

1. Does there need to be a clear proclamation of the Gospel in every sermon and devotion, or is it sufficient that it be implicit rather than explicit at times? Why or why not?

2. In what ways is the Gospel being twisted or distorted by some preachers today?

VI. If time, evaluate the sermon from October 3 in terms of Law, Gospel and Gospel application.

VII. Questions, conclusions and Assignment.

Appendix 7A

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

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Fourth Session: October 12, 1993

I. Devotional Bible Study based on Romans 3.

A. The Problem: Verses 9-12, 19-20.

1. How many people understand God's will and are righteous in His sight (vs. 10-11)?

2. Who can live a perfectly good life (vs. 12)?

3. What part does our keeping of God's Law play in our being declared righteous in God's sight (vs. 20)?

4. What then are the primary purposes of God's Law (vs. 19-20)?

B. God's Gracious Solution, as expressed in 5 Gospel Images:  
Verses 21-28.

1. What is Gospel Image # 1 (vs. 21)?

a. What part does the Law play in our receiving God's righteousness?

b. Who receives God's righteousness and how do we receive it?

2. With what words does Paul remind us of the seriousness of the problem and our need for God's grace and mercy (vs. 23)?

3. What is Gospel Image # 2 (vs. 24a)?

a. What is the full Biblical meaning of the word "justified"? (cf. footnote on v. 24 in Concordia Study Bible).

b. How do we receive God's justification (vs. 24a)?

4. What is Gospel Image # 3 (vs. 24b)?

a. What are the secular and Biblical meanings of "redemption"?

b. How did Jesus Christ accomplish our redemption?

5. What are Gospel Images # 4 and 5 (vs. 25)?

a. What was the significance of sacrifices in the worship and faith of Old Testament believers?

b. What sacrifice did Jesus make for us and our "salvation" (Gospel Image # 6)?

c. What did Jesus accomplish for us through His atonement? (cf. footnote on v, 25 in Concordia Study Bible.)

d. How do we receive the blessings of Christ's atoning sacrifice (vs. 25)?

6. Why is Paul's Summary of the Gospel in vs. 28 such Good News?

C. In Romans 3 Paul clearly presents God's Law and Gospel. Where do we find the application of the Gospel in Romans?

II. Completion of material from Session 3 and Response to Questions.

A. In what ways is the message of the Gospel being twisted or distorted by some preachers or churches today?

1. Some water down the Gospel so it won't offend anyone.

2. Some try to humanize the Gospel so it seems more reasonable and rational and logical.

## Appendix 7C

3. Some twist the Gospel by encouraging people to look inward rather than outward for help and hope (e.g. "the power of positive thinking" or "possibility thinking.")

4. Some offer a "social gospel," with an agenda to change the world through our human efforts.

5. Some twist the Gospel into a new law, giving us a set of rules to live by that will transform our lives and the life of our society.

6. Do you ever watch any evangelists or preachers on T V?  
a. Do they usually preach more Law or Gospel?

b. Do you have any other concerns about their message or their methods?

B. Where does the Holy Spirit fit into our Biblical understanding of Law, Gospel and Gospel Application?

1. The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel to create faith in our hearts, by calling us to repentance and pointing us to Christ.

2. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit sustains and and strengthens the faith of believers in Christ.

3. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit motivates us and guides us in our life of Christian growth (sanctification) and our life of Christian service.

III. Presentation and Discussion on the Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel.

A. (Using the evaluation forms from last Sunday's sermon, point out instances where Law and Gospel were properly distinguished, as well as cases where Law and Gospel were confused.)

B. Significant quotes from C. F. W. Walther (the first President of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) from his book, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel.

Thesis 1: "The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other,--the Law and the Gospel."



## Appendix 7D

Thesis 3: "Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience."

Thesis 6: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is not preached in its full sternness and the Gospel not in its full sweetness, when on the contrary, Gospel elements are mingled with the Law and Law elements with the Gospel."

Thesis 8: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is preached to those who are already in terror on account of their sins, or the Gospel to those who live securely in their sins."

Thesis 13: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when one makes an appeal to believe in a manner as if a person could make himself believe or at least help towards that end, instead of preaching faith into a person's heart by laying the Gospel promises before him."

Thesis 25: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching." (Quote from page 403): "The Gospel must predominate in the preaching of a Christian minister."

C. Summary thoughts on the importance of maintaining the proper distinction between Law and Gospel in our teaching and preaching.

1. The Word of God is like a 2-edged sword.

a. The pastor must preach the Law in all of its fury to those who are secure in their sin or are clinging to their false gods.

b. The pastor must also preach the Gospel in all of its cleansing and comforting power to those who have responded in repentance and faith to the stinging rebuke of the Law.

2. By the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the preacher must know when to comfort the afflicted and when to afflict the comfortable.

3. Any confusion of Law and Gospel can result in the collapse of both.

4. The Gospel, rightly and clearly proclaimed, offers believers the fresh breath of the wisdom and power and riches of God, lifting up Jesus Christ as the source of all of the treasures of God's love and grace and mercy.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

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Fifth Session: October 19, 1993

I. Devotional Bible Study based on Romans 12.

A. The inspiration and source of power for our life of  
sanctification (vs. 1).

1. What is Paul referring to in V. 1: "Therefore,...in view of  
God's mercy..."?

2. From what do Paul's guidelines (which follow in the rest of  
the chapter) for the Christian flow?

B. Conformed or Transformed (vs. 1-2).

1. To what are most people conformed?

2. How can our hearts and lives be transformed, in order to be  
pleasing to God?

3. What is the heart of our spiritual worship which God desires  
of us?

C. Our Spiritual Gifts (vs. 3-8).

1. From where do our spiritual gifts come?

2. What are some of the spiritual gifts mentioned here by Paul  
(others are listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4)?

3. How are we to use the gifts that God gives us?

4. How can we know what gifts God has given us?

D. Gospel Application (vs. 9-21).

1. What are some of the key guidelines and principles that Paul gives Christians, for living a life that is "holy and pleasing to God"?

2. What happens when people try to live by these guidelines through their own effort and power?

3. What are some ways in which the committed Christian would view these Biblical guidelines differently?

a. Our sources of power and guidance are...

b. We live with \_\_\_\_\_ in a relationship of \_\_\_\_\_ and

c. We already possess.....

II. Review of Law, Gospel and Gospel Application in last Sunday's sermon.

III. Presentation and Discussion of Gospel Application

A. How would you define "Gospel Application?"

B. What are some of the synonyms for Gospel Application that we have discussed?

C. What is the purpose of Gospel Application in the sermon?

Appendix 8C

1. What purposes does the Gospel Application serve for the faith and life of the Christian?

2. What can Gospel Application not accomplish?

a. For the unbeliever.

b. For the Christian.

D. Why is Gospel Application an essential part of a Christian sermon?

1. We are S..... - S.....

2. The preaching of justification by grace through faith is solely sufficient for the Holy Spirit to work salvation in the heart of the hearer. But the preaching of sanctification (Gospel Application) is needed for.....

E. The importance of distinguishing the Gospel and Gospel Application in our preaching and teaching.

IV. Assignment for October 28 (Final Class).

A. Complete a sermon evaluation form next Sunday.

B. Read the Epistle of 1 John (5 chapters), focusing especially on chapter 4.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

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Sixth Session: October 26, 1993

I. Review from first week of words and phrases which offer us  
"handles" for helping us recognize and distinguish among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the sermon and the Scripture.

GOD'S LAW	THE GOSPEL	GOSPEL APPLICATION
A. Shows us our S.....	Shows us our S.....	Shows us our life of S.....
B. Diagnoses the illness	Gives us the C.....	Tells us the M.....
C. God Punishes sin	God P.....us <i>for Jesus' sake</i>	God's Spirit then offers us .....
D. Tells us what we must Do.	Tells us what God has D.....for us.	Tells us what we are to D.....in response to God's grace
E. Tells us God's Demands & Commands	Offers us God's..... L..... & F.....	Tells us God's W..... for our life
F. States the Problem	Reveals God's P..... and P.....	Reveals God's P..... for us to follow
G. Bad News for lost S.....	Good News for S..... S.....	Loving guidelines for S.....of Christ
H. God's N..	God's Y...	God's G.....plan

Appendix 9B

II. Sermonic Bible Study based on 1 John 1:5-2:2 and 1 John 4:7-21.

A. 1 John 1:5-2:2 -- After reading each verse, write down whether the verse contains God's Law (L), the Gospel (G) or Gospel Application (GA). (Sometimes a verse may contain more than one). You may write down a phrase which you feel expresses the L, G or GA.

V. 5:

V. 6:

V. 7:

V. 8:

V. 9:

V. 10:

V. 2:1:

V. 2:2:

B. I John 4:7-12, 19-21 -- Follow directions as in previous exercise.

V. 7:

V. 8:

V. 9:

V. 10:

V. 11:

V. 12:

V. 19:

V. 20:

V. 21:

Appendix 9C

C. In small groups of 3-4 persons, develop a brief outline for a sermon, using I John 4:19-21 as your sermon text and verses 7-12 as the context. Begin by stating in one sentence the central thought, the Law, the Gospel and the Gospel Application. Then develop a brief outline for a sermon, based on your understanding of the Law, the Gospel and the Gospel Application.

1. Central thought:

2. The Law (The sin or problem or demand or diagnosis).

3. The Gospel (The Good News of God's solution or cure for the problem, including His power or promise or assurance.)

4. The Gospel Application (God's loving guidelines or instruction or "prescription" for us to follow in response to His love in Christ).

D. A brief sermon outline based on your insights from the text.

1.

a.

b.

c.

2.

a.

b.

c.

3.

a.

b.

c.

III. Review of Last Sunday's Sermon

A. Share responses from Sermon evaluation forms.

B. Go through printed copies of sermon, noting and highlighting the presentation of God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel Application.

IV. Each participant is asked to fill out 3 post-tests, including the congregational survey.

V. Each participant is asked to fill out an evaluation form for the seminar.



Appendix 10

Seminar on Preaching  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Hamilton Ohio

Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow  
September 21-October 28, 1993

PRE-COURSE AND POST-COURSE SURVEY

I. There are three basic themes or parts in most Lutheran sermons.  
Please complete the following definitions of those three parts:

A. God's Law is...

B. The Gospel is...

C. The Application of the Gospel is...

D. Please complete the following phrase: The purpose of  
preaching is...

(Participant #\_\_\_\_)

Pre-Course and Post-Course Survey - Page 2

II. Please complete the following matching exercise by writing the correct number after each phrase:

A. God's Law shows us \_\_\_\_

B. The Gospel shows us \_\_\_\_

C. The Application of the Gospel shows us \_\_\_\_

1. Our Savior

2. Our sin

3. God's will for our daily living

(Participant #\_\_\_\_)

SEMINAR EVALUATION FORM

6-Week Seminar on "The Foolishness of Preaching"  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow  
September 21 - October 26, 1993

1. One thing that I learned or learned more clearly in the Seminar was...

2. One matter relating to distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application about which I am still unclear or confused is...

3. The most helpful part of the course for me was...

4. If this seminar would be taught again, I would suggest ....

5. After participating in this seminar, do you feel that you have a significantly better grasp of the distinction among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application? (Yes or No)

(Further comments are welcome)

6. After participating in this seminar, do you feel that you will now benefit more from the sermons you hear? (Yes or No)

(Further comments are welcome)

Appendix 13 A

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Hamilton, Ohio  
September 21 - October 26 1993

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First Session: September 21 (Revised Outline)

- I. A time to get acquainted
  
- II. Introduction: Purpose and Scope of My Project on Preaching
  
- III. Opening Devotion: "The Foolishness of Preaching"  
Based on 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5
  - A. Why do some people consider the message of the cross to be foolishness? (v. 18).
  
  - B. What is the message and meaning of the cross?  
(Read Rom. 1:16).
  
  - C. Why was the preaching of Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews? (v. 23).
  
  - D. Why did that message seem like foolishness to the Gentiles?
  
  - E. What does Paul mean when he says that God chose the foolish and weak things of this world to shame the wise and the strong?  
(v. 27).
  
  - F. On what did Paul resolve to focus his preaching and ministry?  
(1 Cor. 2:2).

## Appendix 13 B

### IV. Overview of 6-week Seminar

A. Each week there will be lecture and discussion on some aspect of preaching, focusing especially on recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in the sermon.

B. Each participant is asked to fill out a sermon evaluation form immediately after the service each weekend and leave it on my desk.

C. Each week we will study and evaluate a sermon (usually the one from the previous Sunday), focusing especially on recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application.

D. Some weeks we will evaluate some daily devotions from Portals of Prayer and other devotional booklets, in terms of how they present or omit God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application.

E. Particular emphasis for each week:

Week 1: a. Overview of the Seminar

b. The meaning and significance of the Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in the sermon.

c. Recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in daily devotions and sermons.

Week 2: a. Bible study on the purpose and impact of God's Law.

b. The Three Uses of the Law.

Week 3: a. The message, power and proclamation of the Gospel.

b. Preaching the Gospel clearly and creatively.

Week 4: a. Bible study on "Gospel Images" from the New Testament for use in preaching.

b. The proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel.

Week 5: a. The meaning and role of Gospel application in the sermon.

b. The purposes which Gospel application can and cannot serve in the faith and life of the hearers.

c. Is Gospel application a necessary part of a Christian sermon?

d. The importance of distinguishing between Law and Gospel application in preaching and teaching.

Week 6: a. Eight series of simple and succinct "handles" for helping people recognize and distinguish among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in the sermon and in the Scriptures.

b. A sermonic Bible study from 1 John: Identifying God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in each Bible verse.

c. Small Group project to develop a sermon outline, based on 1 John 4:7-12, 19-21, which clearly distinguishes among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application.

d. Post-Course Survey (3 sections) and evaluation of seminar.

Appendix 13 C

V. Pre-Course Survey

VI. Six Underlying Presuppositions for the Seminar on Preaching.

A. The Bible in its entirety is the inspired Word of God, and is the only source and norm of our Christian preaching and teaching.

B. People are brought into a right and saving relationship with God as a gift of His unmerited grace, through our trusting faith in Jesus Christ as our only Savior and Redeemer.

C. The Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people through the Gospel, which is the Good News of all of the blessings which our gracious Heavenly Father offers us, through the merit and mercy of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Gospel assures us that those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior receive His precious gifts of forgiveness, new life and eternal salvation.

D. The primary purpose of preaching is to proclaim with clarity the saving and comforting message of the Gospel of Christ.

E. Christian preaching also includes the accusing finger of the Law, which reveals people's sins and calls them to repentance.

F. Sermons should also include clear and specific application of the Gospel to the faith and life of the believers, to guide them as they "grow up into...Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

VII. Understanding the Meaning and Significance of the Three Parts of the Sermon: Developing simple, understandable "handles" for recognizing God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in sermons, devotions and in Scripture.

<u>God's Law</u>	<u>The Gospel</u>	<u>Gospel Application</u>
A. Shows us our sin	Shows us our Savior	Shows us our life of service
B. Diagnoses the illness	Gives us the cure	Tells us the medicine
C. Reveals the problem	Proclaims the promise and power	Explains God's purpose and pathway
D. God's NO		
E. Bad news to lost sinners		
F. God's demands and commands		

Appendix 13 D

VIII. An Exercise in Recognizing God's Law, the Gospel, and Gospel application in devotions from Portals of Prayer, Christ In Our Home, and Daily Bread (may be used as homework assignment).

A. Read through each devotion, noting in the margin which sections express God's Law, the Gospel or Gospel application (Mark "L," "G" or "A."). Then answer the following questions:

1. Do all of the devotions include the accusing finger of God's Law (the 2nd use of the Law)? Which, if any, do not?

2. Which devotions do not contain a specific presentation of the message of the Gospel? Why not?

3. Are there any devotions which do not mention the name of Jesus Christ? Why not?

4. Are there some devotions which have little or no application of the Gospel to our faith or daily life (3rd use of the Law)? Why not?

IX. Assignment

A. Read the sermon from last Sunday, "Sinner, Saint and Servant," for the purpose of recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application.

1. Underline or note in margin the clearest statements of:
  - a. The accusing finger of the Law
  - b. The message of the Gospel of God's love in Christ.
  - c. The application of the Gospel to our faith and life.

2. Which of the 3 parts of the sermon is presented most clearly?

3. Which of the 3 parts of the sermon needs strengthening?

B. Fill out a sermon evaluation form in church next weekend and leave it on Pastor Duchow's desk after the service.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

++++  
Second Session: September 28, 1993 (Revised Outline)

I. Opening Devotion: The Impact of God's Law

A. God's demands

1. Read Lev. 19:2 and Matt. 5:48.

a. What does God demand of His people?

b. Who can keep these commands?

c. What is the consequence for someone who honestly tries to be perfectly holy?

2. Read James 2:10 and Gal. 3:10.

a. How much leeway does God allow His followers in regard to His demand to obey His Law?

b. For those like the Pharisees, who have a religion based on keeping the Laws of God, what is the end result?

B. The problem

1. Read Psalm 51:5.

a. What is the root of the problem in our relationship with God?

2. Read Eccles. 7:20 and Rom. 3:10.

a. How many people are righteous in the eyes of God?

3. Read Rom. 3:20.

a. How can we achieve a righteousness that is pleasing to God?

C. The diagnosis

1. Read Rom. 3:23.

a. What is our spiritual diagnosis?

2. Read Rom. 6:23a (first half of verse).

a. What do we deserve because of our sin?



## Appendix 14 B

3. Read Eph. 2:1.
  - a. How serious is our spiritual illness?

### D. The cure (The Good News of the Gospel)

1. Read Rom. 6:23b.
  - a. What is God's offer to us who are spiritually dead?

2. Read Rom. 3:21,22,24.
  - a. What did God do to provide the cure for us?

- b. Who is able to receive the cure?

3. Read 1 John 1:7-9.

- a. What do we need to do in order to be able to receive God's cure?

4. Read Eph. 2:8-9.

- a. Can we do anything to earn or deserve God's cure?

- b. Who must receive all the honor and glory for our cure?

## II. Review of and response to surveys from previous week

### A. Pre-Course Survey - Page 1

1. The majority gave acceptable definitions of the Law. Two defined Law in terms of the third use of the Law.

2. There was considerable confusion of Law and Gospel in several responses.

3. There was also some confusion between Gospel and Gospel application in their responses.

### B. Pre-Course Survey - Page 2

1. Seven out of eleven matched the three phrases correctly.

2. Two failed to follow directions but did give written responses which were partially correct.

3. Two matched God's Law with God's will for our daily living (Gospel application).

Appendix 14 C

III. Presentation and Discussion on God's Law

A. What is God's Law?

B. The three uses of the Law

1. A fence or curb on sin

a. What broad purpose does God's Law serve in the world?

b. How is God's Law like a fence for the Christian?

2. A mirror to show us our sin

a. What do you see when you first look into a mirror in the morning when you get up?

b. How does God's Law function as a mirror for the Christian?

c. What do many non-Christians think they see when they look into the mirror of God's Commandments?

d. What does 1 John 1:8-10 have to say about the importance of being honest with ourselves and honest with God about our sin?

e. How should we respond when we look into the mirror of God's Law?

3. A guide for our life

a. Why does the Christian desire to use God's Laws and commands as a guideline for his life?

b. How important is our motivation for wanting to please God and to follow His will?

c. Can a non-Christian use God's commands as a loving guideline for his life in the same way a Christian does?

d. How closely can sincere Christians follow God's guidelines for their life?

Appendix 14 D

e. This "Third Use of the Law" is sometimes referred to as "Our life of sanctification," "Gospel application," or "Gospel implications." Which of these phrases would be most helpful for you in understanding and expressing what we mean when we speak of God's Law in terms of His loving guidelines for the life of the Christian?

f. Can you think of another phrase besides those three which would clearly express what we mean by the "Third Use of the Law?"

C. Further discussion of the purpose and use of God's Law

1. Which of the three is the most important use of God's Law?

2. Why do you think so?

3. Which use of the Law is most important in the sermon? Why?

4. Does the second use of the Law in the sermon serve a different function for hearers who are non-believers and believers?

a. If so, what is the difference?

b. Is it correct to say that "God's Law always accuses"?

5. How do "Holiness" churches differ from the Lutheran Church in their approach to and use of God's Law?

a. What is the primary way in which God's Law is used in many "Holiness" and "Fundamentalist" churches?

b. Why is this approach so appealing to many people?

c. Holiness churches often picture our Christian life in terms of living in a fenced-in area, surrounded by God's laws and commands. What is wrong with this picture?

d. What would be a more helpful image or analogy for picturing our Christian life?

Appendix 14 E

IV. Evaluation of sermon from September 19, focusing on recognizing and distinguishing among God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application

A. What was the central thought of the sermon?

B. What was the primary sin or problem addressed in the sermon?

1. Where is it addressed in the sermon?

C. What was the Gospel message that the preacher related to the sin or problem?

1. Where is it found in the sermon?

D. What application or implications of the Gospel did the preacher share for the faith and life of the Christian?

1. Where is it found in the sermon?

E. Which of the three parts of the sermon was presented most clearly and adequately?

F. Were any of the three parts presented unclearly or inadequately?

V. If time permits, evaluate the sermon from September 26, using the same questions from the sermon evaluation form.

VI. Assignment

A. Read and study Matt. 5 and Eph. 2.

1. Note which contains more Law and which includes more Gospel.

2. Where do you find the clearest statement of the Gospel?

B. Fill out a sermon evaluation form in church next weekend and leave it on Pastor Duchow's desk.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

++++  
Third Session: October 5, 1993 (Revised Outline)

I. Devotional Bible study based on Matt. 5 and Eph. 2

A. Matthew 5 (from Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount")

1. Are the Beatitudes of Jesus (vv. 3-12) primarily Law, Gospel or Gospel application? Why do you think so?

2. Is the section on Salt and Light (vv. 13-16) primarily Law, Gospel or Gospel application?

3. Is the rest of the chapter primarily Law, Gospel, or Gospel application?

4. Who can fulfill the demands of verses 20 and 48?

a. What hope then do we have?

5. Is the message of the Gospel explicit or implicit in this chapter?

B. Eph. 2:1-10

1. Are verses 1-3 an expression of the Law, the Gospel or Gospel application? What words or phrases indicate that?

2. Are verses 4-7 Law, Gospel or Gospel application? What words express that most clearly?

3. Verses 8-10 contain one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of God's plans and purposes for His people.

a. How clearly is the accusing finger of the Law expressed?

b. Where in verses 1-10 is the accusing finger of the Law clearly expressed?

c. With what words is the message of the Gospel proclaimed?

d. How clear is the message of the Gospel in verses 8-10?

e. What words express the application of the Gospel to the life of the Christian (vs. 10)?

Appendix 15 B

II. Presentation and Discussion on The Gospel

A. What is the Gospel?

1. How would you define the Gospel to someone who didn't know much about the Christian faith?

2. What Bible verse is sometimes called "The Gospel in a nutshell?"

B. The Good News of the Gospel.

1. Why is the Gospel "Good News" for the believer in Christ?

2. What blessings and promises does God offer us through the Gospel?

3. How is the Gospel like God's cure for the sickness of sin?

4. How often do we need to hear the proclamation and message of the Gospel? Why?

5. What are we to do with the message of the Gospel (cf. Matt. 28:18-20)?

C. The power of the Gospel.

1. What is the source of the Gospel's power?

2. How powerful is the Gospel of Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16, including Greek word for "power"--"dunamis")?

3. A well-known preacher wrote, "A Christ-centered, Gospel-rich sermon is a living organism." What did he mean by that statement?

4. How does God work through the Gospel in the heart and life of the believer?

## Appendix 15 C

D. What words or phrases or images does the Bible use to express the message and meaning of the Gospel?

1. How can the preacher be creative in his expression of the Gospel, rather than resorting to using common "cliches"?

2. Can you think of any fresh and creative words or ways to express the message and meaning of the Gospel?

E. Proclaiming the Gospel clearly

1. Does there need to be a clear proclamation of the Gospel in every sermon and daily devotion, or is it sufficient that it be implicit rather than explicit at times? Why or why not?

2. In what ways is the Gospel being twisted or distorted by some preachers today?

III. If time permits, evaluate the sermon from October 3 in terms of Law, Gospel and Gospel application.

VII. Assignment for October 12

A. Read Rom. 3 and 6.

1. Focus especially on Paul's distinction between the Law and the Gospel.

2. Where in those chapters do you find the clearest statement of the Law and the clearest statement of the Gospel?

B. Fill out a sermon evaluation form in church next weekend.

Appendix 16 A

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

++++  
Fourth Session: October 12, 1993 (Revised Outline)

I. Devotional Bible Study based on Rom. 3

A. The problem: Verses 9-12, 19-20

1. How many people understand God's will and are righteous in His sight (vv. 10-11)?

2. Who can live a perfectly good life (vs. 12)?

3. What part does our keeping of God's Law play in our being declared righteous in God's sight (vs. 20)?

4. What then are the primary purposes of God's Law (vv. 19-20)?

B. God's gracious solution, as expressed in six "Gospel Images" (Vv. 21-28).

1. What is Gospel Image # 1 (vs. 21)?

a. What part does the Law play in our receiving God's "righteousness"?

b. Who receives God's righteousness and how do we receive it (vs. 22)?

c. With what words does Paul remind us of the seriousness of the problem and our need for God's grace and mercy (vs. 23)?

2. What is Gospel Image # 2 (vs. 24a)?

a. What is the full Biblical meaning of the word "justified" (cf. footnote on v. 24 in Concordia Study Bible)?

b. How do we receive God's justification (vs. 24a)?



Appendix 16 B

3. What is Gospel Image # 3 (vs. 24b)?

a. What are the secular and Biblical meanings of "redemption"?

b. How did Jesus Christ accomplish our redemption?

4. What are Gospel Images # 4 and 5 (vs. 25)?

a. What was the significance of sacrifices in the worship and faith of Old Testament believers?

b. What "sacrifice" did Jesus make for us and our "salvation" (a 6th Gospel Image)?

c. What did Jesus accomplish for us through His "atonement" (cf. footnote on vs. 25 in Concordia Study Bible)?

d. How do we receive the blessings of Christ's atoning sacrifice (vs. 25)?

6. Why is Paul's summary of the Gospel in verse 28 such Good News?

C. In Rom. 3 Paul clearly presents God's Law and Gospel. Where do we find the application of the Gospel in Romans?

Appendix 16 C

II. Where does the Holy Spirit fit into our Biblical understanding of Law, Gospel and Gospel application?

A. The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel to create faith in our hearts, by calling us to repentance and pointing us to Christ.

B. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit sustains and strengthens the faith of believers in Christ.

C. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit motivates us and guides us in our life of Christian growth (sanctification) and our life of Christian service.

III. Presentation and discussion on the proper distinction between Law and Gospel

A. (Using the evaluation forms from last Sunday's sermon, point out instances where Law and Gospel were properly distinguished, as well as cases where Law and Gospel were confused.)

B. Read and discuss the following quotes from C. F. W. Walther (the first President of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) from his book, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel.

Thesis 1: "The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other,--the Law and the Gospel."

Thesis 3: "Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience."

Thesis 6: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is not preached in its full sternness and the Gospel not in its full sweetness."

Thesis 8: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is preached to those who are already in terror on account of their sins, or the Gospel to those who live securely in their sins."

## Appendix 16 D

Thesis 13: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when one makes an appeal to believe in a manner as if a person could make himself believe or at least help towards that end, instead of preaching faith into a person's heart by laying the Gospel promises before him."

Thesis 25: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching." (Quote from page 403): "The Gospel must predominate in the preaching of a Christian minister."

C. Summary thoughts on the importance of maintaining the proper distinction between Law and Gospel in our teaching and preaching

1. The Word of God is like a 2-edged sword.

a. The pastor must preach the Law in all of its fury to those who are secure in their sin or are clinging to their false gods.

b. The pastor must also preach the Gospel in all of its cleansing and comforting power to those who have responded in repentance and faith to the stinging rebuke of the Law.

2. By the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the preacher must know when to comfort the afflicted and when to afflict the comfortable.

3. Any confusion of Law and Gospel can result in the collapse of both.

4. The Gospel, rightly and clearly proclaimed, offers believers the fresh breath of the wisdom and power and riches of God, lifting up Jesus Christ as the source of all of the treasures of God's love and grace and mercy.

### IV. Assignment for October 19

A. Read Rom. 12 and Eph. 5 and 6.

1. What is the source of power for our life of sanctification?

2. What are some of the key guidelines and principles that Paul gives Christians for living a life that is holy and pleasing to God?

B. Fill out a sermon evaluation form in church next weekend.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

++++  
Fifth Session: October 19, 1993 (Revised Outline)

I. Devotional Bible Study based on Rom. 12

A. The inspiration and source of power for our life of  
sanctification (the Gospel as outlined by Paul in chapters 1-11)

1. What are the "mercies of God" to which Paul is referring in  
verse 1?

2. From what do Paul's guidelines (which follow in the rest of  
the chapter) for the Christian flow (cf. Rom. 3:21-28)?

B. Conformed or transformed (vv. 1-2).

1. To what are most people conformed?

2. How can our hearts and lives be transformed in order to be  
pleasing to God?

3. What is the heart of our spiritual worship which God desires  
of us?

C. Our spiritual gifts (vv. 3-8)

1. From where do our spiritual gifts come?

2. What are some of the spiritual gifts mentioned here by Paul?  
(Others are listed in 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4.)

3. How are we to use the gifts that God gives us?

4. How can we know what gifts God has given us?

## Appendix 17 B

### D. Gospel application (vv. 9-21)

1. What are some of the key guidelines and principles that Paul gives Christians, for living a life that is "holy and pleasing to God"? (There are at least twenty listed in vv. 9-21.)

2. What happens when people try to live by these guidelines through their own effort and power?

3. What are some ways in which the committed Christian would view these Biblical guidelines differently from a non-Christian?

a. Our sources of power and guidance are...(God's Word and grace and Spirit).

b. We live with...(Christ) in a relationship of...(faith) and ...(forgiveness).

c. We already possess...(our eternal inheritance in heaven).

## II. Review of Law, Gospel and Gospel application in last Sunday's sermon

### III. Presentation and discussion on Gospel application

A. How would you define "Gospel application"?

B. What are some of the synonyms for Gospel application that we have discussed?

Appendix 17 C

C. What purposes does the Gospel application in the sermon serve for the faith and life of the Christian?

2. What can Gospel application not accomplish for the unbeliever?

3. What can Gospel application not accomplish for the believer?

D. Why is Gospel application an essential part of a Christian sermon?

1. We are S..... - S.....

2. The preaching of justification by grace through faith is solely sufficient for the Holy Spirit to work salvation in the heart of the hearer. But the preaching of sanctification (Gospel application) is needed for:

a. Giving us direction and encouragement as we strive, by the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to "grow to maturity in Christ".

b. Helping us develop a more winsome witness for Christ.

c. Helping us grow in our life of Christian service.

E. Why is it important to distinguish clearly between the proclamation of the Gospel and the presentation of Gospel application in our preaching and teaching?

IV. Assignment for October 26 (final class)

A. Complete a sermon evaluation form next Sunday.

B. Read the Epistle of 1 John (5 chapters), focusing especially on chapter 4.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

Recognizing and Distinguishing Among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the Sermon

A Six-Week Seminar on Preaching  
Led by Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow

++++  
Sixth Session: October 26, 1993 (Revised Outline)

I. Review from first week of words and phrases which offer us  
"handles" for helping us recognize and distinguish among God's Law,  
the Gospel and Gospel Application in the sermon and the Scriptures.

<u>GOD'S LAW</u>	<u>THE GOSPEL</u>	<u>GOSPEL APPLICATION</u>
A. Shows us our S.....	Shows us our S.....	Shows us our life of S.....
B. Diagnoses the Illness	Gives us the C.....	Tells us the proper M.....
C. God Punishes sin	God P..... us for Jesus' sake	God's Spirit then offers us P.....
D. Tells us what we must Do	Tells us what God has D.... for us	Tells us what we are to D.. in response to God's grace
E. Tells us God's Demands & Commands	Offers us God's..... L.... & F.....	Tells us God's W.... for our life
F. States the Problem	Reveals God's P..... and P.....	Reveals God's P..... for us to follow
G. Bad News for lost S.....	Good News for S..... S.....	Loving guidelines for S..... of Christ
H. God's N..	God's Y...	God's Gr..... plan

Appendix 18 B

II. Sermonic Bible study based on 1 John 1:5-2:2 and 1 John 4:7-21

A. 1 John 1:5-2:2 - After reading each verse, write down whether the verse contains God's Law (L), the Gospel (G) or Gospel Application (A). (Sometimes a verse may contain more than one.)

You may also write down a phrase which you feel expresses L, G or A.

V. 5:

V. 6:

V. 7:

V. 8:

V. 9:

V. 10:

V. 2:1:

V. 2:2:

B. I John 4:7-12, 19-21 - Follow directions as above.

V. 7:

V. 8:

V. 9:

V. 10:

V. 11:

V. 12:

V. 19:

V. 20:

V. 21:



Appendix 18 C

C. In small groups of 3-4 persons, develop a brief outline for a sermon, using I John 4:19-21 as your sermon text and verses 7-12 as the context. Begin by stating in one sentence the central thought, the Law, the Gospel and the Gospel application. Then develop a brief outline for a sermon, based on your understanding of the Law, the Gospel and the Gospel application.

1. Central thought:

2. The Law (the sin or problem or demand or diagnosis):

3. The Gospel (the Good News of God's solution or cure for the problem, including His power or promise or assurance):

4. The Gospel application (God's loving guidelines or instruction or "prescription" for us to follow in response to His love for us in Christ):

D. A brief sermon outline based on your insights from the text.

1. The problem or illness

a.

b.

c.

2. God's cure: His power and promise

a.

b.

c.

3. God's prescription: His loving guidelines

a.

b.

c.

Appendix 18 D

III. Review of Last Sunday's Sermon

A. Share responses from sermon evaluation forms.

B. If time, review printed copies of the sermon, noting and highlighting the presentation of God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application. Discuss each other's discoveries.

IV. Each participant is asked to fill out 3 post-tests, including the congregational survey

V. Each participant is asked to fill out an evaluation form for the seminar

Appendix 19 A

REFLECTIONS ON FIRST SESSION OF SEMINAR ON PREACHING

September 21, 1993

There were eleven participants in the first class, including eight who had been formally invited and three who responded to a general invitation. Four people who had agreed to participate did not come. The get-acquainted portion went well, with everyone responding to three simple questions I put on the board, relating to their length of membership at Immanuel, their religious background and a memorable moment they had experienced in a church.

The opening devotion was well received, although the participants were slow to respond to the questions. I soon realized that I would need to simplify the material somewhat, partly because most of the participants had a limited background in Bible study. The Bible study could have been a bit shorter, based on 1 Cor. 1:18-25 instead of 1:18-2:5.

The overview of the six-week seminar seemed a bit overwhelming to some. They may not have realized that there would be "homework." Some of the participants took longer than I had anticipated to fill out the pre-course survey. Some of them seemed a bit stressed by the idea of taking tests. A couple of the older participants had difficulty following some of the directions correctly.

## Appendix 19 B

I reviewed the six underlying presuppositions for the course rather quickly. It would have been helpful if we would have had more time to discuss them. I felt that the section on developing simple, understandable series of "handles" for the three parts of the sermon was probably the most fruitful portion of the class, because of the active involvement of the participants. I made a few comparisons on the board among God's Law, the Gospel and the application of the Gospel. The participants then suggested several additional words and phrases that were helpful in grasping the distinction among the three. They seemed to be pleased that they could contribute to the learning process for me as well as for themselves. I sensed, however, that some members of the class were not grasping the concepts as well. I will need to shorten and simplify this session for any future seminar.

I feel that the use of devotions from a variety of devotional booklets has the potential to be a very helpful exercise. However, we were rushed and did not cover it as thoroughly as I would have liked. I gave them the rest of the devotions to do as a homework exercise, which probably made too long an assignment. Another time I would leave this section until the second or third session. On the positive side, some of the participants did seem to have an "aha" experience when they could find no clear presentation of the Gospel in the two devotions from Daily Bread.

## Appendix 19 C

I intended to utilize daily devotions in later sessions as a means of helping the participants recognize God's Law, the Gospel and Gospel application in a message that was briefer than a sermon, but I never found sufficient time to use them again. In any future seminar I would hope to utilize them more.

Because of time constraints, I could only make a few comments about the sermon from the previous Sunday. I did ask them to fill out a sermon evaluation form on that sermon during the week. We were running late at the close of the class, so there was little time left for questions or comments. The assignment seemed a bit overwhelming to some participants who had not anticipated that there would be much "homework" to do between classes. They seemed quite willing, however, to participate as fully as possible in the program.

## Appendix 20 A

### REFLECTIONS ON SECOND SESSION OF SEMINAR ON PREACHING

September 28, 1993

The opening Bible study was well-received. The discussion indicated that the study developed in a logical and understandable way for them the purpose and impact of God's Law, as well as the cure of the Gospel. The Bible study seemed to set the stage well for the presentation on the nature and uses of God's Law, especially the second use of the Law.

I also received very positive feedback from the lecture and discussion on the three uses of the Law. A light seemed to go on for several of them as they explored the purposes of God's Law for unbelievers as well as believers. Our discussion also included the impact that legalistic churches and television preachers have on the faith and understanding of many Christians today.

The section on the "Third use of the Law" was helpful for me as well as the participants. They agreed unanimously, without any prompting, that it was helpful to use some other phrase to describe this portion and purpose of God's Word which did not include the word "law." They felt that it was confusing to use the word "law" to describe both the accusatory function as well as the sanctifying purpose of God's Word.

## Appendix 20 B

We had a lengthy discussion about the best alternative term to describe what we have traditionally called the Third use of the Law. They unanimously agreed that "Gospel application" was a much more helpful and accurate term than "Gospel implications." They felt "implications" had a negative connotation which indicated uncertainty or lack of clarity about the meaning and significance of the Gospel for our faith and life.

On the other hand, they all agreed that "Gospel application" offered a clear and positive tone. They felt this term would make clear for the Christian that these Biblical guidelines and exhortations were an expression of God's love and care for them, to help them grow in their Christian life and ministry.

Once again there was more than enough material. The last couple sections were held over until the next week. I decided in preparation for this class that it would be helpful to include in the assignment each week a couple chapters from the Bible which would help them focus on the theme of the class for the coming week.

Appendix 21 A

REFLECTIONS ON THIRD SESSION OF SEMINAR ON PREACHING

October 5, 1993

The Bible study did not generate quite as much discussion or enthusiasm as the one did the previous week. Perhaps it was a bit lengthy. A few of the participants did not seem to be able yet to distinguish clearly between the Law in its function to accuse and convict the sinner, over against its function as a guide for our Christian life.

Our discussion which carried over from last week about the impact of "holiness" churches and television preachers generated some lively discussion. They seemed to grasp the significant difference between viewing our Christian faith and life under the Law and under the Gospel. I emphasized the importance of seeing our Christian life as a relationship with Christ that is ours by his grace through our trusting faith in him. I also described our Christian faith as a journey, following Christ in faith, in distinction from the holiness emphasis on the necessity to live within a "fence" of laws and rules and commands in order to be considered a Christian.

We briefly reviewed the sermon from September 19. I offered at least one quote from each of their sermon evaluations to give them some positive reinforcement, showing that each of them had correctly identified at least one of the portions of the sermon. It was a bit difficult,



## Appendix 21 B

however, to re-focus on a sermon from two weeks ago. It might have been better to have focused on the sermon from the previous Sunday. I feel that it might be helpful to spend more time in some of the sessions reading and discussing sermons or daily devotions together in order to give them practice in discovering and distinguishing among the Law, the Gospel and Gospel application. Another possibility would be to spend time during one or two of the sessions viewing and discussing a video of a sermon being preached, including a sermon by another pastor.

The remainder of the session was devoted to a presentation on the Gospel, which focused on clarifying its message and stressing the importance of its clear proclamation. They did very well identifying Gospel words and images from the Scriptures. We also took time to explore the Gospel in the Old Testament, in response to a participant's question.

We left a small section for the next week about the ways that the message of the Gospel is sometimes twisted and distorted in the church and in society today.

Appendix 22 A

REFLECTIONS ON FOURTH SESSION OF SEMINAR ON PREACHING

October 12, 1993

Nearly half the session was devoted to a spirited Bible study based on Romans 3. The primary emphasis was on the six "Gospel Images" which Paul shares in verses 21-28. One of the participants had mentioned the previous week that she found it difficult to express the Gospel content in her weekly sermon evaluations other than in words similar to "Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins." She and others seemed to appreciate the realization that the Bible uses several words and images to express the Good News of the Gospel.

We spent considerable time exploring the richness of these six images: The "righteousness" of Christ, which is imputed to us; "justification" by grace through faith; the "redemption" from our slavery to sin which Jesus purchased for us on Calvary; the "sacrifice" of "atonement" on the cross, where Jesus satisfied the righteous wrath of God against our sin; and our "salvation" from the powers of sin, death and the devil which Jesus accomplished for us through his victorious death and triumphant resurrection.

I then covered fairly quickly some material remaining from session three about various ways in which some preachers and television evangelists today twist and distort the message and meaning of the Gospel. Then I answered a

## Appendix 22 B

couple questions which had been asked at the end of the previous class, including how the Holy Spirit fits into our Biblical understanding of Law, Gospel and Gospel application. The rest of the class was devoted to a discussion on the distinction between Law and Gospel. We focused on six theses from C. F. W. Walther's classic book, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel. Some of the participants, who were having difficulty grasping some of the finer points of this distinction, seemed to be consoled by the quote from Thesis 3: "Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular."

One of the insights from Walther that seemed to be a beacon of light for some class members was his quote in relation to Thesis 25: "The Gospel must predominate in the preaching of a Christian Minister." The majority of the group were under the impression that the primary purpose of a sermon was to offer some application and insights for the daily problems and needs of the hearer. It seemed to open a new door of understanding for them to realize that the heart of a Christian sermon is always to be the clear proclamation of the saving Gospel of Christ.

It was a bit humbling for me to realize that the people sitting in the pew were not necessarily receiving the "main course" (the Gospel) each week from my sermons. Rather they seemed to be feeding more on the "salad" and "dessert" (the

Appendix 22 C

Law and the application). I realized that besides making a bolder effort to proclaim the Gospel clearly each week, I would need to do more educating from the pulpit and by other means about the proper distinction and balance among the Law, the Gospel and the application in the sermon.

I closed by emphasizing that the primary challenge of the preacher is to proclaim the Gospel each week in a fresh and winsome manner, that will allow the Holy Spirit to bear rich fruit in the heart and mind and life of the hearers.

Appendix 23 A

REFLECTIONS ON FIFTH SESSION OF SEMINAR ON PREACHING

October 19, 1993

The Bible study on Romans 12 was well received. The participants seemed to grasp well the point that all of the application and exhortations that Paul shares in this chapter must flow from and be empowered by the Gospel. Only the Holy Spirit can transform our hearts and lives. The presentation might have been more helpful, however, if it had been more inductive.

The review of the sermon from the previous Sunday by the assistant pastor was fruitful. Most of the participants did well in discovering the Law, Gospel and Gospel application in the sermon. I have noticed a significant improvement over the weeks in their ability to distinguish among the Law, the Gospel and the application in the sermon, as well as to discern the central thought of the sermon.

The presentation on Gospel application seemed to be especially helpful. Some of the material was new and other portions were a review of points that we had previously covered. They responded especially well to the questions about the purposes which Gospel application serves for encouraging spiritual growth in the faith and life of the hearers. Their answers were appropriate and insightful. They focused on our growth in spiritual maturity, our growth in our Christian witness and our growth in our life of Christian service.

## Appendix 23 B

Our closing discussion on distinguishing between Gospel and Gospel application included the insight from one of the participants that Gospel application was essentially Law. We reviewed again the distinction between the second and third uses of the law, equating the third use of the law with Gospel application. I also used the occasion to remind them of the insight from our Lutheran Confessions that "the Law always accuses."

Appendix 24 A

REFLECTIONS ON SIXTH SESSION OF SEMINAR ON PREACHING

October 26, 1993

After the opening prayer we began with a review of eight series of words and phrases that simply and succinctly convey the distinctions among Law, Gospel and Gospel application. Several of these "handles" were developed during a very fruitful discussion in the first session, which expanded on my original presentation. This exercise was designed as a review and summary of these distinctions. It also served to reinforce for the members of the class the value of their participation in the seminar.

The class members not only responded quickly to the words I had in mind, but also came up with other "handles" which fit the pattern just as well or better. For example, to complete the phrase (F-Gospel Application), "Reveals God's 'pathway' for us to follow," they suggested the words "plan" or "purpose," which were as good or better than my suggestion of "pathway."

The participants then did the sermonic Bible study on their own, focusing on whether each verse from 1 John 1:5-2:2 and 1 John 4:7-12, 19-21 was an expression of Law, Gospel, Gospel application or a combination of two of them. Most of the participants did well distinguishing among them, especially the verses that were Law or Gospel. They had more difficulty discerning the verses that were Gospel application, most often calling them Law and sometimes calling them Gospel.

## Appendix 24 B

During our discussion of these verses, one of the participants suggested that Gospel application often seemed like Law. He noted that sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between the two. I said in reply that Gospel application is in essence Law. It is not Gospel. That is why the writers of the "Formula of Concord" used the term "Third Use of the Law," which has generally been used since then in Lutheran circles to describe the goals and guidelines which God gives us in his Word to describe for us our life of Christian growth and sanctification.

Why, then, do I prefer to use the term "Gospel application" rather than "Third Use of the Law" to refer to the Christian's life of sanctification? First of all, I have found that the concept of three uses of the Law is often confusing to lay people. Using another term such as Gospel application differentiates the second and third use of the Law more clearly. Secondly, I feel that the term Gospel application expresses the essential Biblical truth that our life of Christian growth flows and grows only from the power of the Gospel. The Law cannot effect a change in our hearts and lives. Only the Holy Spirit can do that, through the power and promise of the Gospel.

This is one of the primary differences that we have with the Reformed understanding of Law and Gospel. Many within the Reformed tradition believe that when the Law is used as a rule and guide for our life, it can motivate us to change. They feel that the committed or sanctified Christian is moved to



transform and change his life through the guiding principles of God's laws and commands in the Scriptures. In an earlier session when we compared devotions in Our Daily Bread with devotions in Portals of Prayer, we found that the devotions from the Reformed tradition seldom included any specific presentation or proclamation of the Gospel. The Lutheran devotions, however, almost always contained a clear proclamation of the Gospel, as well as the presentation of the accusing finger of the Law. On the other hand, many of the devotions in Portals of Prayer contained little or no specific application of the Gospel to the life of the reader.

Based especially on Paul's insights in Romans, Lutherans have always maintained that using the Law to motivate us only makes us slaves again to the Law. The grace of God that sets us free from our slavery to the Law, as well as our slavery to sin and Satan, flows to us only through the Gospel. God's righteousness comes to us "apart from observing the Law" (Rom. 3:28). It is granted to us as a gift, only "through faith in Jesus Christ" (vs. 22).

For the third portion of the seminar we divided into two groups of five each to develop a brief outline for a sermon, using 1 John 4:19-21 as the text and 1 John 4:7-12 as the context. Since we had just studied those verses, I felt that the exercise would be fairly easy. However, both groups seemed to have difficulty at first clearly identifying the Law, the Gospel and the Gospel application in the text and context. Some of the problem may have been due to a lack of

leadership, especially in one of the groups. Another problem may have been inadequate directions. A third problem was that the process of developing a textual basis for a sermon was foreign to them. They did conclude that the process of developing a textual sermon that would always include Law, Gospel and Gospel Application was a much more difficult task than they had imagined.

At the completion of this exercise, they said they had a much better appreciation of the challenge and complexities involved in writing a sermon. Once they were clear on the Law, Gospel and application in the text, the sermon outline flowed more smoothly for most of them. They found it helpful to use the medical analogy for the three portions of the sermon: "Illness" or "diagnosis" for the Law, "Cure" for the Gospel, and God's "Medicine" or "Prescription" for the Gospel application.

We did not have time to discuss the sermon from the previous Sunday or to share responses from their evaluation forms. They spent the rest of the time filling out three "post-tests" and a seminar evaluation form. The first two tests were the same ones they had taken at the beginning of the first session. My purpose was to measure their growth in understanding during the 6 weeks of the course.

The third test was the congregational survey which ninety-five members of the congregation filled out during the worship service on August 8. My purpose was to compare the responses of the participants with those of the "control

group." My hypothesis was that they would be better able to recognize and distinguish among the Law, the Gospel and Gospel application after the completion of the six-week seminar. The final seminar evaluation form was designed to offer feedback on the positive aspects of the seminar as well as soliciting suggestions for improving the course. They provided several constructive suggestions in their comments.

Immanuel Lutheran Church  
1285 Main Street  
Hamilton, Ohio

Rev. Gilbert J. Duchow  
16th Sunday after Pentecost  
September 19, 1993

Theme: "The Trademark of the Christian"  
Topic: "Sinners, Saints and Servants"  
Text: Matthew 18:15-20 & Romans 13:8-10

*Introduction*

Sometimes people ask what the requirements are to join our church. Usually we mention the importance of worshipping regularly with us and then participating in the Pastor's Adult Class. Not too long ago someone called one of our secretaries and asked what the "minimum" requirements were to join Immanuel. Come to find out, what they were really asking was whether or not they had to attend the pastor's class all those weeks. In our society today people seem to want everything, even their religion, on the easy payment plan.

As I was reflecting on the texts this past week, trying to develop an outline on the theme, "The trademark of the Christian," three "S" words kept coming to mind: "sinner, saint and servant." As I thought about it, those seemed to be the key qualifications for joining a Christian congregation. Christians are, first of all, people who humbly admit before God that they are lost and condemned sinners. Secondly, by God's grace and mercy we are called by Christ to be His saints, by virtue of being covered with His holiness and righteousness. And then, in response to God's gracious love and blessings, Christians joyfully accept their role as servants in God's family, dedicating their heart and life to the loving service of their Lord and their fellowman. That is who we are as the people of God--sinners, saints and servants.

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Many people outside the church have the misconception that the church is made up of people who are better than others, or at least think they are. If they can convince themselves that they are more righteous than some people they know who attend church regularly, they conclude that they don't need organized religion. If you ask them about their religion, they may say something like, "I try to do my best and live by the golden rule." If you talk to them about the problem of our sinful human nature, which separates us from our righteous God, they may give you an earful about some of the sins of people they know who attend church, and then conclude that by comparison they don't come off too badly.

The Bible tells us, however, that the church is made up of people who humbly admit to God and themselves and their brothers and sisters in Christ that they are sinners, who fall hopelessly short of being able to please God or earn His favor. The Bible makes clear, "There is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). The church, therefore, is not a haven for perfect people, who think they are better than others, but rather a hospital for people who realize they are sick with sin, a sickness which they inherited and which pervades their whole being, a sickness which if it is not treated by the Great Physician, will lead to eternal death.

Our human nature leads us to try to diagnose and cure ourselves. When we try to diagnose ourselves, however, we almost always minimize the problem. We try to convince ourselves that we are not really all that bad. Oh, we may have a few minor faults and imperfections, but

L we never commit any of the big, bad sins that we read about in the newspaper. Other people may gossip, but all we do is just pass along the stories that we hear. Other people may be greedy, but we just want our fair share. Other people may rob and steal, but we never do anything more than cut a few corners on our income tax or bring home a few things from work. Other people may be spiteful and hold grudges toward those who have hurt them, but we are hardly ever hateful toward others. So we really don't need a cure, we conclude, because we are not such bad people, especially in comparison to "you know who!"

Jesus made clear, however, that He could only help those who admitted they were spiritually sick and needed the Great Physician: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor," Jesus said, "but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." In other words, Jesus cannot help those who are self-righteous and insist that they are good enough to please God and earn his favor. But Jesus has all kinds of patience and compassion for those who admit that their situation is hopeless, and put their hope and trust in Him.

Therefore, we might say that the church is "for sinners only,"-- people like you and me who have found a sanctuary where we can come clean before God and each other; a fellowship where we don't have to try to justify or excuse ourselves, but rather can come before God without excuse, to receive His mercy and forgiveness; a place where the Great Physician Himself promises to be present, whenever 2 or 3 or more come together in His name, to receive the grace and blessings that flow from His holy Word and Holy Supper. The church is the place where we don't have to try to impress others with our goodness or piety, but rather can be accepted for who we are and especially for "whose" we are--sinners in the hands of a loving and forgiving Lord and Savior.

G And what a loving Savior He is! The Bible tells us that Jesus, the perfect Son of God, became sin for us, taking upon Himself our human nature, and then carrying all of our sin and guilt to Calvary, where He paid in full the price for our full and free forgiveness. Through His sacrificial death on the cross, He freed us from our slavery to sin, so that we might live with Him in His family now and enjoy His heavenly blessings forever. What a forgiving Lord He is also! He never holds our faults and failures against us. He forgives and forgets. When we live by faith in Him, He covers us each day with a fresh robe of His righteousness, which covers over all of our guilty stains.

G That is how we qualify to be called "saints" of God. We are God's saints not because we are more holy and righteous than someone who doesn't belong to a church, or because we are always so saintly, but because our Heavenly Father has sought us out, saved us from sin, death and the power of the devil, and made us His children and heirs of His heavenly blessings. No matter how hard we try to be saintly, however, or to live a life that is pleasing to God, we always mess up and end up disappointing ourselves and others. The harder we try to be holy, the more guilt we pile on ourselves for all of the holes in our holiness. As long as we live on this earth, therefore, we must learn to live with our dual nature: We are sinner-saints--at the same time righteous and yet sinners.

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hint  
of G

more  
hints  
of  
Gospel

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L+G

G We are God's saints because our guilty stains are covered over with the robe of Christ's righteousness and holiness. Thus when our Heavenly Father looks at us, all He sees is our saintliness, because He sees us through Christ. But when others outside the church look at us, what they often see are the ugly warts of our old, sinful nature showing through. They see all of our faults and failures and weaknesses, because they are looking through human eyes instead of the forgiving lenses through which our God sees us. They may think they see a bunch of hypocrites in the church. Most of the time, however, what they see among the people of God are not hypocrites but sinner-saints,--Christians who are far from perfect but are perfectly forgiven, Christians who are saved not by their level of goodness or piety, but only by the merit and mercy of Jesus Christ. It is not easy going through life as a sinner-saint, but that is the only kind of saints there are--this side of eternity.

GA A final qualification for members of Christ's family is that they be servants of the Master. We are saved to serve. Our Lord calls us to be His servants in the midst of all areas of our life. Our Christian service is not only what we do to serve the Lord in and through our church, but also includes whatever ways we show and share the love and care of Christ in the midst of our daily life at home or school or work, as well as in our community and nation. Our epistle reminds us, for example, of some of our responsibilities as Christian citizens. We are to show respect for the governing authorities, even when we disagree with them. We are to pay the taxes that we owe. Above all, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

GA *our love  
flows from  
his love  
A plea  
from G!*  
Likewise, within the fellowship of the church our Lord calls us to be servants of one another, to keep on loving and forgiving each other, just as He continues to love and forgive us, no matter how many times we may disappoint Him. As the Gospel for today emphasizes, we are forgiven in order to forgive. We are to strive always, by the grace and guidance of God's Word and Spirit, to bring about reconciliation with any brother or sister in Christ from whom we have become estranged, not for the sake of justifying our own position, but rather out of Christian care and concern for the person who has caused offense to us or to others in the church.

*one lesson  
summary  
and  
challenge*  
That, Paul says, is the only debt from which we should never seek to be free. Most of us have some monetary debts from which we would like to be free. But the debt to love one another is not one that we can or should try to pay off. "Let no debt remain outstanding," Paul says, "except the continuing debt to love one another." Jesus Christ has paid in full the entire debt of our sin, so that we can stand before our Heavenly Father as His forgiven saints and servants. What a blessing it is to be indebted to Him forever and ever. Amen.

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