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The Will of God in the Life of a Christian

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Klug: The Will of God in the Life of a Christian

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

The Will of God in the Life of a Christian

EUGENE F. KLUG

The Word of God in the Theology
of Lutheran Orthodoxy

ROBERT D. PREUS

Homiletics

Theological Observer

Book Review

VOL. XXXIII

August 1962

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The Will of God in the Life of a Christian

(With special reference to Eph. 4:17-32)

By EUGENE F. KLUG

IN what has been called "the greatest piece of theological writing" to come from his pen, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther scores his contemporary Erasmus very sorely because of his unwillingness to assert plainly and forthrightly each and every truth which the Scriptures contain. Erasmus took a stance frequently duplicated today when theologians contend that Scripture does not contain propositional truth. Although we grant, of course, that it does not embrace formulations like a dogmatics textbook, the fact is that Scripture, as Luther reminded Erasmus, contains many doctrinal assertions which must be expressed and defended. "Take away assertions," Luther argued, "and you take away Christianity."¹ Therefore to Erasmus, whose thinking Luther characterized as not mattering "a scrap what anyone believes anywhere so long as the world is at peace," the great Reformer shouted with vehemence, still hoping to put starch in the puttylike backbone of the great humanist: "Let us have men who will assert!"²

It is hardly strange that the doctrine which Luther believed needed to be asserted above all, the one on which the church would either continue to stand or would fall, was the Scripture's teaching on justification by faith.

The most important article of the entire body of Christian doctrine is how we are saved. . . . If this article of our soul's salva-

tion is grasped and held with a sure and firm faith, the other articles, such as that of the Trinity, will easily follow.³

The true wonder of this doctrine, according to Luther, was to be seen in this, that while all natural religions taught a salvation by works, this article taught that all works are entirely excluded and that the sinner is saved by God's wondrous grace in Christ *freely*. Thus on the basis of the Scripture's clear assertions Luther could say: "It is a great thing to hold and believe in sincere faith that all my sins are forgiven and that through such faith I am righteous before God. That is certainly a wondrous justice and far different from the justice of all jurists, all learned and wise men of this world."⁴

But Luther was by no means an antinomian, as some individuals in his day charged. Nor indeed is Christian theology to rule out the proper place of the Law in the life of the Christian. Christian righteousness, our redemption from sin, as Paul teaches,⁵ is ours freely through Christ by faith, and as a result the Law has no claim against us. For the believer in Christ the greatest knowledge, according to the new man in him, "is *not* to know the Law, to be ignorant of works and of the whole ac-

³ WA Tr VI No. 6732. Cf. Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), I, No. 1253.

⁴ *Sermon on Matt. 18:23 ff.*, Nov. 13, 1530. WA 32, 159—169. (Quoted in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951—1957], II, 505.)

⁵ Especially Romans 3—5 and Galatians.

¹ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, ed. J. T. Packer-O. R. Johnston (London: James Clarke, 1957), p. 67. WA 18, 603, 28.

² WA 18, 603, 22.

tive righteousness."⁶ This, above all, must be emphasized, since man inclines by nature to seek to inject his own merit and abilities into the arena of his salvation. However, the believer also always has his old man, his old sinful nature upon him, and as Luther says, "Upon this old man, as upon an ass, there must be laid a burden that may press him down, and he must not enjoy the freedom of the Spirit, or grace, except he first put upon him the new man by faith in Christ."⁷ Moreover, besides the deterring and mirroring effect which the Law continues to have for the old man in the believer, it also properly serves the Christian, as Luther notes, by helping "everyone do his duty in his vocation according to the rule of God's Word."⁸ This is a response or effect which follows upon faith, and without faith it cannot indeed occur. In this respect the believer is like the earth which "bringeth not forth fruit except first it be watered and made fruitful from above . . . except first, without any merit or work of ours, we be made righteous by the Christian righteousness."⁹

Thus the will of God in the life of a Christian is a very real thing. There is "justification of works," a "righteousness of works," not in the sense that by it salvation is in any way effected or affected, but in the sense that the Christian, because of the faith and love for God in his heart, will be constrained by his love, not by the Law, to do his heavenly Father's will, indeed will seek to do it. There is no constraint

here in the usual sense of the word, nor is there any option or choice either. John writes: "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3,4). The good works of a Christian thus serve him himself as well as others around him, as an index of the faith that is in him, of his justification. It is in this way that there is a connection between the two great doctrines, justification and sanctification.

If we then ask what are the good works of a Christian man, the answer is twofold: they are works, first of all, which are done from a believing heart and with a willing spirit, and secondly, they are works which conform to the norm of God's holy will. Since the Law thus serves as a guide for the believer, some theologians came to distinguish a third function.

Although Christians, in so far as they are regenerate, do the will of God spontaneously, the Law must nevertheless be preached to them on account of their Old Adam, not only as a mirror revealing their sins and as a check on the limits of the flesh, but also as a rule of their lives. This, too, is precisely what Luther maintained against Agricola: "The Law must be retained that the saints may know which are the works God requires."¹⁰

Human reason, of course, has always objected to this Scriptural handling of the Law and has insisted that the formula must read: "If thou wilt live unto God, thou must keep the Law," the implication being that what a man does, in some way, contributes also to his salvation. It is here that

⁶ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, "Middleton" edition, rev. and ed. Philip S. Watson, (1953), p. 23. Cf. WA 40 I, 43, 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24. WA 40 I, 45, 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 513. WA 40 II, 103, 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25. WA 40 I, 46, 22.

¹⁰ "Introduction," in *Concordia Triglotta*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 162.

Luther insists that the Scriptural injunction or formula must stand: "Except thou be dead to the Law thou canst not live to God."¹¹ By so insisting he has prevented the sins of the believer from being waved accusingly before his conscience, and he has moreover demonstrated that charity's proper relationship to faith is seen and taught when it does neither "form nor adorn my faith, but my faith formeth and adorneth charity."¹² It is on this fundamental distinction that the will of God in the life of the Christian must be viewed.

Such a study could properly be made by drawing together all the salient references of Scripture, in a kind of analogy of faith, which relate to the subject of the believer's godly life, or it could be made by focusing more closely on a single section of Scripture where the subject is treated. It is the latter direction that this paper will take, and the specific area of concentration will be on the second part of Ephesians 4. By its very nature the study will be primarily exegetical, the intent being to let this significant section of Holy Writ speak out on the subject of God's will in the life of a believer.

It will be well to note that in the first part of Ephesians 4 Paul had eloquently admonished all who were members of the body of Christ, the church, to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. God has given various gifts to His church, particularly the gift of the ministry, and all the gifts, large and small, are to serve the growth of the body of Christ in faith and life. In the second part of the chapter the admonitions of the apostle focus still more

closely on the sanctified life and conduct of the members of Christ's body. The contrast is drawn especially between the immorality of the unconverted Gentiles and the new life in the converted Gentiles (which these Ephesians were), the exhortation being to leave behind the old manner of life and to exercise fully the new.

In Paul's treatment of the subject two things especially are emphasized for the godly life, Christian purity and Christian integrity. Where these are ignored, the danger is that the body, the communion of believers, becomes sick, and when it is sick, it is right to suppose that the sick body of mankind in general has little hope for help in its day. At the same time this suggests that healing for mankind is primarily a spiritual problem and that in our day it might be indeed more proper and Scriptural to look for help in this predicament in which the troubled world finds itself not first of all in medicine but in the Christian Gospel and the Christian ministry. There is even a strong movement within psychotherapy to recognize the validity of this claim today, as is witnessed by the following statement: "It now appears that Boisen was right, that psychopathology is a moral problem, through and through, and that it has gravitated into medical hands by default and complacency on the part of the Christian ministry and churches."¹³ This is a remarkable concession and admission on the part of one of the profession's respected practitioners, but in recent years, by his own word, he has come to see more and more the significance of guilt in the healing process of troubled minds and of the rightful place which the

¹¹ *Galatians*, op. cit., p. 158. WA 40 I, 267, 28.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 163. WA 40 I, 275, 15.

¹³ O. Hobart Mowrer, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*, p. 72.

Christian faith ought to maintain in the healing art. For the churches he has this sobering reminder:

What the average theologian and religious worker apparently does not know and is reluctant to recognize is the extent to which the system of concepts and practices in which he has been schooled, during his training in pastoral psychology, is today in a state of deterioration and impending collapse. From the standpoint of those of us who know these developments *from the inside*, it is tragic to see the clergy continue to pay homage to what, in reality, is rapidly becoming a hollow shibboleth. For more than a decade, now, I have been pointing to the logical and empirical incongruities in psycho-analytic theory, on which so much psychiatry and clinical psychology is directly or indirectly founded.¹⁴

The church fulfills its task, in part at least, when it responds *ex animo* to what Paul states (v. 17): "This I say therefore and testify in the Lord that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind." It is a solemn reminder which every believer must recognize without demur that his faith indeed sets him apart in this life. So Paul spoke to the Ephesians. Gentiles they still were by their ethnic ties, but by their conversion they had become Christian believers and hence were now morally set apart. It is the Christian believer, the man who can cast an eye backward to see what he once was and in what bondage he was held and who can now rejoice in what through Christ he has become, who can say: "I must first know that God has forgiven my sins, that He has cast them into the depth of the sea, before it affords me real joy to lead

a sanctified life. Before that it was a grievous burden to me. At first I was angry with God; I hated Him for demanding so many things of me. I should have liked to cast Him from His throne. I mused in my heart, It would be better if there were no God. But when I had been pardoned and justified, I delighted, not only in the Gospel, but also in the Law."¹⁵

Before a man's conversion his entire life, particularly his way of thinking, reasoning, exercising his will, is empty, as the apostle says (ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν), without genuine morality. This was so, because it was a life centered in the things of this world, which are vanity. It was a life in which the Law, though indeed of itself most excellent, had the effect of increasing the terrors of the troubled conscience, of unsettling it, indeed of driving it to desperation. It was the experience of the Galatian Christians, for example, that the more they became entangled with the legalism of the Judaizers, the more distorted became the Gospel and the more uncertain became their hope of salvation. This is the inevitable result when Law and Gospel are confused. The way to peace and inner assurance never lies in the direction of reducing the claims which the Holy Law of God has against us and, by reducing them, seeking to place them within the reach of man. It is the Christian, above all, aware of what he was and what he has become by God's grace, who must remember: "In God's eyes the life of a true Christian cannot look very beautiful. If God would not spread the cloak of Christ's righteousness

¹⁵ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), p. 91.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 76.

over us, we should have to be eternally damned and lost, in spite of the fact that we have become true Christians."¹⁶

Paul describes why it is that natural man's understanding is beset by such serious shortcomings. He says: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (v. 18). The apostle's description of the "emptiness of mind" which characterizes man by nature is very vivid. However man himself may look on it, this is how he is seen in the eyes of God: "darkened in understanding" (ἐσκοτωμένοι τῆ διανοίᾳ), a man lacking utterly in genuine moral truth and rightness, marked with the brand of moral falsehood and depravity. Moreover, all such are "estranged" (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι), alienated in their wills from the life in and with God, the life that once existed before man's fall, that original spiritual communion and fellowship. If this spiritual death is not removed, the prospect before man is eventual eternal death. It may be well to note that the heathen or the unconverted still have the form of morality, civil righteousness, but the lack of spiritual life destroys their sense of judgment, and they invariably adopt a form of religion which is far beneath them, and they live without hope in the world.

This ignorance in natural man is the condition which sin brought on and hence bears directly upon original sin, which is inherent in all men by birth and involves their natural enmity, blindness, and stupor over against God and His will. Along with this ignorance goes a natural "hardness of heart" (πῶρσιν), because it is character-

istic of natural man to be unreceptive and obtuse toward God. It is this teaching, of course, which human reason and sentiment most object to, the fact of man's inherent sinful condition and the negative attitude toward God which results from it.

A natural sequel to the "hardness" just described is the surrender to lewdness which Paul states is the course of natural man. "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (v. 19). It is a state of moral insensibility (ἀπηληγκότες), being "past feeling" for what is right, decent, and godly. Easily they "surrender" (παρέδωκαν) themselves to lewdness (ἀσέλγεια) for the working of all manner of moral uncleanness (ἀκαθαρσία), with greediness, or covetousness (ἐν πλεονεξίᾳ). This describes the frame of mind of the man who has allowed full play to his desires and who thinks that these lusts are the most important thing in the world and who looks on others as persons to be exploited for his own ends and gratification. This is quite different from "the Freudian notion that man sickens, not from sin but from excessive conscientiousness."¹⁷ We are only now coming again to see how correct the Pauline view of man is and how inadequate, not to say injurious, those views on sin are which consider sin merely a weakness in man, or a necessary stage in man's passing from unconscious to conscious moral freedom, or some vestigial ignorance.

The word ἀσέλγεια merits closer examination. It has been called the ugliest word in the New Testament. The KJV translates it with "lasciviousness" (wantonness),

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 310, 311.

¹⁷ Mowrer, p. 66.

the RSV with "licentiousness." In Plato it has the meaning "impudence," and in classical Greek generally it described the man who was sensually triggered to indulge in every pleasure possible. Not only does it carry the meaning of moral uncleanness but also implies that the man who is controlled by it makes no pretense of covering up his sin and cares not at all what people say or think about his indulgence as long as he can gratify his desires. In the New Testament we find ἀσελγεία associated chiefly with three aspects of man's sin: (1) with πλεονεξία, sheer, shameless greed, the unbridled longing always to possess more; (2) with adultery, lust, and mere animal passion; (3) with drunkenness, where it depicts total self-indulgence. Josephus used it to describe the shocking outrage of Jezebel when she defied all decency and flouted public opinion by erecting a temple for Baal. No other word quite approximates this term as a grim commentary on the nature of natural man. It is this more than anything else which justifies Luther's verdict on man as "a monster" and "mad beast."¹⁸ And it was also on this element that psychoanalysis sought to concentrate, hoping that it could heal the neurotic symptoms in a troubled mind by bringing into clear consciousness these so-called disowned sexual cravings and desires, thus implying "that the real evil in mental disorder is not to be found in the conflict but in the sense of isolation or estrangement."¹⁹ However, opposed to this permissive attitude and of acceptance into one's conscious self of the uncleanness within the heart, there comes now a new tack in modern

¹⁸ *Galatians*, op. cit., p. 298. WA 40 I, 481, 6.

¹⁹ Mowrer, p. 63, quoting Anton Boisen.

psychotherapy. Mowrer states flatly and in critical judgment of the old view: "Today we can no longer honestly accept Freud as the prophet which many theologians have tried to make of him. Instead, he is the Pied Piper who beguiled us into serious misconceptions and practices."²⁰

The apostle now turns to the regenerate Gentiles, the Christian believers, pointing out that Christ is the big difference in them: "But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have learned Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus" (vv. 20, 21). When the Ephesians became Christians, Paul reminds them, they were not given to understand that it would make no difference if they continued in their former vein and sinful life; but, or "rather" (this is the meaning here of εἴ γε; the conditional clause is not to show doubt but reality) with the Gospel that they had heard and learned (concerning Christ) had come also instruction in righteousness. Accordingly, Paul adds, "as truth is in Jesus." This is not the Gospel truth or message of salvation, nor truth as opposed to error, but true and righteous living, moral integrity, which is in and through Jesus in them. The contrast is between truth and ματαιότης, the vanity and emptiness of natural man's moral condition.

Even as Jesus is the Source of our salvation through His perfect atonement, so He is also the good Master, who leads His disciples in paths of righteousness, for they who would be His must ever walk with Jesus and follow His example pure. It is part and parcel of the mystical union brought about by faith that "Christ writes His Law directly into the heart, so that

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

a person living under Him is a law unto himself. He is not coerced by a force from without, but is urged from within."²¹ The idea, of course, is not that for a Christian the chief and prime objective of his life is the keeping of the Law, for the Law can provide neither motivation nor life; but there is need above all, as Luther taught, for the Christian by daily repentance and faith to grow into Christ through the means of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit's proper life-giving tool and dynamic. These words of Walther on the failure of the Law by itself are also pertinent: "If you would direct men to do good works and for their comfort add a remark like this: 'You should, indeed, be perfect; however, God does not demand the impossible from us. Do what you can in your weakness; only be sincere in your intention' . . . you would be preaching a damnable doctrine; for that is a shameful corruption of the Law. God never spoke like that from Sinai."²²

While the demands of the Holy Law of God are not to be reduced, the sinner must know that there is forgiveness for all his sins with the Father, for the gracious Lord imputes to faith the righteousness which avails unto life eternal. But even a believer's faith is not to be viewed as a good work which carries a certain meritorious quality before God. "We are not to look back to our conversion for assurance, but we must go to our Savior again and again, every day, as though we never had been converted. My former conversion will be of no benefit to me if I become secure. I must return to the mercy seat every day, otherwise I shall make my former conver-

sion my savior, by relying on it. That would be awful; for in the last analysis it would mean that I make myself my savior."²³

The Apostle Paul exhorts his Christian readers: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Vv. 22-24)

First of all, Paul impresses on the Ephesians the importance of putting off and away the former heathenish way of life, the old habits and conduct. This is pinpointed with τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον, the old man, or as Stoekhardt says in his commentary on this verse, "the entire moral *habitus*." The old man, as pictured in Scripture (e. g., Rom. 6), is totally depraved and wicked ever since Adam. Natural man is a moral agent like Christian man, but with this difference, that in the latter the old man, the old moral *habitus*, is restricted by man's regeneration, by Baptism, by faith. Paul says that the old man is crucified (Rom. 6) and that the believer is now freed from his control, though not from his continued presence within or from his activity, since the believer is constantly being tempted and used by him to sin.

The Christian now, as Luther puts it, by daily contrition and repentance drowns and puts down under the heel this old Adam, in order thus to keep control, to restrain evil acts, to hold back sinful words, thoughts, and desires. And this he is to keep on doing. This is quite a different way of looking on things from that of the

²¹ Walther, p. 71.

²² Ibid., p. 80.

²³ Walther, p. 207.

young clergyman who, as Mowrer reports it, told him that he had been advised in the seminary "to be very careful in his sermons not to say anything that would make anyone 'feel guilty.' People have too much guilt already, he had been told; and if you talk about sin and guilt and moral responsibility from the pulpit, you only increase the danger of 'neurosis.'" ²⁴ Again: "They are deeply indoctrinated with the view that neurosis and psychosis arise from too much 'morality,' rather than too little, and that the minister must carefully recognize his 'limitations' in dealing with such problems. The total impact of this experience has, it seems, not been a good one." ²⁵ To this Paul the Apostle, who knew man's nature very well, regenerate and unregenerate, would have replied with a hearty "Amen!" — though the apostle could hardly be expected to agree with Mowrer's confused and unscriptural method of atonement, which he describes as "a sober program of expiation," in which confession is to play a major role. Obviously, his theology at this point is not as good as his psychology. He does not know the Biblical concept of atonement or redemption or righteousness before God; he confuses Law and Gospel; he telescopes sanctification into justification and fails to see, as Luther says, that while the latter is "one big lump," the former proceeds in piece-by-piece fashion for the life of the believer.

The apostle goes on to remind each Christian that this old man in him is φθειρόμενος, that is, "corrupted" according to the lusts of deceit, but hardly "destroyed." On this point Stoeckhardt comments: "The old man is infested with a

squirming brood of the most shameful lusts and desires. These deceive and cheat man by promising him good fortune, joy, and pleasure, while in reality, if given free reign, they ruin him in body and soul, even now upon earth, and finally drive him to eternal death and destruction." ²⁶

Underlying the Christian's renewal (ἀνανεοῦσθαι) is first of all the regeneration by the Holy Ghost, but this does not obviate the need that each believer has to be renewed daily in his walk and conduct of life. He needs to cultivate a spirit and attitude which are attuned to the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him, for a man will act and speak and think as he is inwardly. It is by evangelical imperatives of this type, "be renewed in the spirit of your mind," that God indeed draws from him holy and sanctified living! As a man thinketh in his heart so is he. Therefore the admonition! Luther translates well: "Erneuert euch im Geist cures Gemuets." For this is faith's response, and faith, as Walther observes, "cannot be shut in. It is like a sea that can be tapped: it rushes irresistibly through any proper opening that is made for it. A believer is ready to serve everybody wherever he can." ²⁷ The believer is, of course, not excused from being outwardly righteous. The spirit, as Luther says, fights against the flesh which seeks to disobey the Law, and the spirit often succeeds in effecting conformity to God's holy will and continues to grow in this grace of triumphing over sin. ²⁸

The tense of the aorist infinitive ἐνδύ-

²⁶ G. Stoeckhardt, *Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, trans. Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: CPH, 1952), p. 216.

²⁷ Walther, p. 293.

²⁸ *Galatians*, op. cit., p. 503. WA 40 II, 90, 26.

²⁴ Mowrer, p. 75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

σασθαι indicates a decisive act, but it includes also the sense of a continuing effect to this process of "putting on the new man." Our regeneration did not mean a destruction of original sin and the inclination to depravity; these are with us still. Because they are, there is need that in our exercise of Christian sanctification the new man daily come forth and arise who shall live before God, since he is created (κτισθέντα) after the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:25), in true righteousness and true holiness (ἀληθείας goes with both concepts). The tension of being a Christian is very real, but it is to be expected, if indeed the tune is to be right, just as there must be tension on the violin string if it is to sing. Walther states: "God gives to Christians in their initial stage the sugar-bread of pleasant feelings. But when they have passed through a number of spiritual experiences which exercised their faith, the sugar-bread stops, and they are given black rye-bread, which sometimes is quite hard and tastes stale. God calculates that after sufficient experience has been gained in Christianity by these Christians, the new food will not be too severe a trial for them, while it would be indigestible to such as are still children in faith. When trials come, many Christians indulge in reminiscence of their former happiness, how they relished the sweet experience and joyful assurance that God in heaven was gracious to them, something of which they had no inkling prior to their conversion. . . . They may long for the food of those former days, but they feel that they can digest the hard rye-bread that is offered them now."²⁹

The new man, like God, who creates the new *habitus* in us, is without sin, holy,

pure, righteous, in perfect harmony with the holy God. This does not mean that he will no longer feel or be sensible to the provocations of the flesh—this will continue as long as life—but it does mean that the new man refuses to give assent to the flesh. Stoeckhardt is in tune with the Scripture and with reality when he states the equation of sanctification in mathematical proportion: "In the measure in which the Christian puts on the new man and in his walk and life exemplifies this new man, in that measure the image of Christ, the likeness of God, will appear in his life and walk."³⁰

The situation is well known to us. It is a ceaseless struggle between the two egos in us, the old and the new man; the one with habits and personality as before, the other a new person in his relationship with His God; the one serving the law of sin, the other seeking to serve Christ and to do His will in love. The new man must set the pace and keep control like the gyro on a ship, so that no matter how the old man would like to go, no matter what buffetings come from the outside, the Christian proceeds manfully and God-pleasingly in the direction his new *habitus* has set as the course. Each day the old Adam works to break loose and to control us, and each day the new man must rise up and resolutely put him down, a process, incidentally, which is to lead him to become ever stronger, with the image of Christ shining through ever brighter.

Such navigation is never easy. "It is wholly incorrect and false to picture the Christian as being always fervent in prayer and as if praying were his most cherished occupation. It is not so; it takes much

²⁹ Walther, p. 204.

³⁰ Stoeckhardt, p. 219.

struggling on the part of the Christian to make him fit for prayer, fervent in it, and confident that he will really obtain from God what he is praying for. That is the reason why the Lord's Prayer, which is recited so often, has been called the greatest martyr on earth. Christians are no exception to the rule."³¹ But the believer must not be discouraged, or think that this endless struggle is evidence that he is not a Christian. Only if this struggle were no longer happening would there be cause to believe that he had fallen from grace. Always alert and aggressive, the new man in us must not seek for peaceful coexistence with the old but strive for the mastery, until that day comes when we shall awaken in the perfect likeness of Christ, when the old man shall forever be behind us, and when the image of God shall be in us as in Adam before the Fall.

Through verse 24 Paul has given general admonitions to put off the old man and put on the new man. Now he comes to specific points in the verses that follow. Some interpreters have tried to divine a certain order or grouping in these admonitions which follow, but the only principle which seems apparent is the rhetorical device of stating opposites or contrasts, first the sin and then the virtue. This has the intended effect of allowing each reader to see again the evil into which the old man so readily leads him and the good to which his new man must give attention. When addressed to such as have the new man and the Spirit of God dwelling in them, it would serve to draw forth the exercise of those new powers, drawn from the Spirit, which enable a man to do that which is good and overcome that which is evil.

³¹ Walther, p. 314.

In verse 25 the apostle places lying opposite truthfulness: "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." The participle ἀποθέμενοι, "putting away," has the force of an imperative in this case, for it is coordinated with the imperative that follows. Thus the meaning is "put away lying!" The old man is inclined to lying, deceit, exaggeration, prevarication, hypocrisy, insincerity; making promises with no intention of keeping them, being bright, breezy, and brotherly in an affected way. The new man, on the other hand, is a man not only of his word but also of a true word, sincere, honest, upright. His very words reflect the spirit of ingenuousness and untarnished sincerity which is within him. Thus, in this instance, ἀλήθεια has its usual Hellenistic meaning, "truthfulness." The Christian man demonstrates such conduct toward each who is his neighbor (τοῦ πλησίον), but in this case the context narrows the sense to one's fellow Christian and member of the body of Christ, as explained by ὅτι ἐσμὲν ἀλλήλων μέλη.

The limits of anger are discussed in verse 26: "Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath." This verse has undergone various interpretations, less because of variant textual readings (there are virtually none) than because of problems of squaring what it appears to say with the rest of the Scriptural ethic. Some commentators wish that Paul would have "simplified" things by using "but" instead of "and," so that the reading would be: "be ye angry *but* sin not." However, the text does not allow this reading. Still others suggest that the first imperative is to be taken as a permissive form, "if you are

angry or have to be . . .," and the second as jussive or prohibitive, "only do not sin." The effort of Phillips ends with this paraphrase: "If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper." Stoekhardt's interpretation is summed up well in the German version: "Suendigt nicht im Zorn." He goes on to say: "The Apostle here remembers that also the Christian, who still has his old Adam, may at times be aroused to anger, especially if he is irritated by some action of his neighbor; now for such a case, the Apostle, without in any way justifying or excusing this, admonishes the Christian that he is to control himself and beware of letting his wrath drive him to some sinful action or to allow this wrath to remain in his heart."³² The difficulty of this interpretation is that it does not accord well with verse 31 and with the general admonition to Christians that they should not give place to wrath.

There is another possible solution which fits both the context and the rest of Scripture better. Taking the two imperatives simply as they stand, coordinated by *καί*, the meaning would be: there are times for anger, justifiable anger; for example, when Christ, or His Word and will, or our neighbor's welfare, is at stake, when injustice or hypocrisy raise their ugly heads; but even then, in such justifiable anger, the Christian must not overindulge himself but proceed immediately to let love and mercy flow into the troubled waters. He will hate and be angry with sin, but not with the sinner.

Moreover, all anger, even that righteously held, must have short duration. Hence the day ought not end, the sun ought

not set, with the Christian still harboring any angry thoughts in his heart.

What the Apostle has stated as regards anger ties in closely with verse 27: "Neither give place to the devil." In New Testament usage *διάβολος* signifies *the* devil, *the* slanderer, not any slanderer, and is used in distinction from *δαυμόνιοι*, the evil powers or spirits, demons, who are Satan's cohorts. In no other way do Christians give Satan more place, more elbow room, more opportunity, for working his evil, than when they keep the flag of wrath and anger waving. Nothing disturbs the peace and brotherhood of the saints more surely and gives Satan more satisfaction.

In verse 28 the apostle Paul contrasts thievery with honest laboring in the gaining of a living: "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." By his reference to *ὁ κλέπτων*, "he who thieves," Paul touches upon another common failing among men, also Christians. The word is used in its broadest possible meaning to include all manner and kind of thievery, cheating, dishonesty, false ware and dealing. In his treatise *On Trading and Usury* Luther has an up-to-date description of all of the tricks of the trade, the kind which go under the cloak of respectable business dealing.³³ He scores especially the fact that big thieves in government, church, and business get by, while the little ones are usually caught and punished. He quotes Cato with approval: "Simple thieves lie in prisons and stocks;

³³ Cf. also Luther's *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility*, in *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1915), Vol. II.

³² Stoekhardt, p. 222.

public thieves walk abroad in gold and silk."³⁴

The heathen exemplify the going philosophy of the world in any century, and their thinking runs this way: I will take as much for my goods as I can get, not how much I ought, and I will use any method I can get away with. This philosophy cannot be part of the Christian ethic. Here the governing principle must be depicted by the word *κοπιᾶτω*, "let him work hard," working and earning with one's hands the thing that is good, that is, the gain from one's labors. This is the legitimate, God-promised return.

Even the qualifying purpose clause, "that he may have to give to him that needeth," does not supply the legitimate end which will justify the means. This phrase simply makes plain that God will bless each person's honest labors with a surplus, out of which then he will have the wherewithal to minister to the necessities of the man in need wherever he may find him.

Avarice is no respecter of persons and organizations, and it is significant that Scripture gives so much attention to it. Luther observes that the slogan "Giving for God's sake" to the churches, and giving in other "pretty and showy ways," can merely be the devil's technique of getting us to focus on wrong ends and in the process to neglect what God most desires, the care of "living, needy Christians." Luther goes on: "We would not prevent the building of suitable churches and the adornment of them, for we cannot do without them, and the worship of God ought rightly be conducted in the finest way; but there should be a limit to it, and we should have a care

that the appointments of worship be pure rather than costly."³⁵ Luther continues: "God will not ask you, at your death and at the last Day, how much you have left in your will, or whether you have given so much or so much to churches; but He will say to you, 'I was hungry and ye fed Me not; I was naked and ye clothed Me not.' Let these words go to your heart, dear man! Everything will depend on whether you have given to your neighbor and done him good. Beware of show and glitter that draw you away from this."³⁶

Expanding on the subject raised in verses 25 and 26, Paul now has more to say about the sins of the tongue: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Apparently the apostle feels compelled to stress this again, because the offense is so frequent also among Christians. It is out of character for a Christian to have foul, profane, corrupt (*σαπρός*) speech. The emphasis undoubtedly is on the worthless word that comes from the mouths of Christians rather than on the vicious or slanderous word. Hence the opposite word here is called *ἀγαθός*, the sense being not chiefly that which is pure but that which is worthwhile, wholesome, and salutary, for it will contribute to "upbuilding of the need," that is, where there is needed upbuilding. The reference is to the faith and life of the brethren or fellow saints in the body of Christ.

The meaning of *χάρις* in the phrase "that it may minister grace" is simply to "confer favor or benefit." R. C. H. Lenski

³⁴ Ibid., IV, p. 35. WA 15, 313, 9.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 48. WA 6, 44, 34.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 48, 49. WA 6, 45, 12.

feels that it refers to edifying grace, that is, the divine grace in Christ. This seems to go beyond the context, however, since Paul merely emphasizes the blessing and fruit of a word which is good and worthwhile, not *the* Word of grace.

Paul expresses the reason why Christians should be productive of such conduct. "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (v.30). If Christians permit their tongues to utter that which is corrupt and foul or not worthwhile, they must realize that by it they will be grieving the Holy Spirit. This they must not do! The Holy Spirit has made us His dwelling place, and this is a wonderful reality which should be both comfort and deterrent for us. The doctrine of the *unio mystica* after all is used in Scripture both to warn as well as to inspire us. Francis Pieper captures the true Scriptural emphasis here when he observes: "The Holy Spirit, who is the *causa efficiens* of faith, is grieved by evil works and will finally depart from the heart."³⁷ Hence this admonition! There is always the danger besetting the believer that his faith may be weakened and finally destroyed, not merely by the presence of sin in his members or body, for this is inevitable, but by continued persisting in sin with intent and knowledge. Walther has described this condition well in the words: "It is not the manifest enormity of their sin that casts such people out of their state of grace and puts out the heavenly light of their faith, but the attitude of their heart towards their sin."³⁸

The apostle has pointed up the severe and stark contrast that would pertain in

having the Holy Spirit within us and having a corrupt word coming out of the mouth by the position of emphasis into which he has placed τὸ ἅγιον. It is the Holy Spirit's gracious work in us to make us holy, and any and every interference with this blessed activity constitutes a serious affront to, indeed a grieving of, the Spirit, who is holiness personified. When we speak evil or shameful things, it is the grieving Spirit in us who calls our attention to the fact and the manner in which we have soiled the name of Christ, whose name we bear, and how we have disturbed our filial relationship with the Father.

By the Spirit ye are sealed, ἐν ᾧ ἐσφραγίσθητε. In ch. 1:13 Paul had spoken of the same phenomenon. The Spirit was promised by God and by Christ to all who believed, to all in whom the Spirit worked effectively through the Word, to dwell in them, to bring His witness of their being the children of God, to seal this all with the assurances and certainties of the promises of Almighty God. It is His work—the coming to faith, the continuing in faith, the consummation in faith, not in any mechanical way, but through the Word and the washing of regeneration. That is what makes salvation sure, because it is by God's grace and power in us; and this, of course, is what also makes it grace.

The day of redemption (ἡμέρα ἀπολυτρώσεως) which Paul has in mind here is that day when finally we shall be delivered from all the evil of this world and our flesh, from our old Adam. This is the day, too, for which all the created world groans in travail as it waits for the deliverance.

The apostle Paul's reminder in verse 31 that anger and angry speech are not in character for a Christian comes with strong

³⁷ *Christian Dogmatics*, III, 23.

³⁸ Walther, p. 220.

and rhetorical thrust: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."

The stages of ill feeling and wrath are now minutely detailed by the apostle, so that his readers might have no difficulty in recognizing the reach and penetration of evil in their lives. The Greek word *πᾶσα* brings a special accent to what he has to say about each of the following evils, the sense being that "each and every bit" of the particular evil should be put away.

First in the list is *πικρία*, that bitter feeling, or bitter, hateful state of mind, toward the other, whether, as Stoeckhardt states, "provoked by some real or imaginary insult." The location of this sentiment is described in Scripture as being in the very center of the human personality, the heart. Arising from the same source is *θυμὸς*, that hostile resentment and exasperation which leads to spite and grudge. Such feelings smolder underneath for a time, and if they are not quenched they blaze forth in the inevitable burst of anger, *ὀργή*. And such angry feeling, by the usual course, triggers loud and angry shouting (*κραυγή*) and insulting abuse. The final step in this series is *βλασφημία*, reviling and cursing, a situation just short of blows. Stoeckhardt adds with proper insight: "The fact that Paul does not proceed to cap this climactic series of angry speech and anger by mentioning also actual bodily attacks as its termination, shows that he is speaking to Christians and therefore restricts himself to those sins by which even Christians may be tempted and to which they may be driven."³⁰ The apostle concludes the verse

with a summary statement, "together with all baseness" (*σὺν πάσῃ κακίᾳ*), by which he intends to include all the categories of ill feeling just described as well as any others of a similar nature.

In the last verse of ch. 4:32 Paul now expresses the positive Christian graces: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Those in whom the new man operates are to be: *χρηστοί*, good, kindly beneficent; *εὐσπλαγχνοί*, tenderhearted, merciful to the compassion of Christ for all such; *χαριζόμενοι*, forgiving, not seeking retaliation, not rewarding evil for evil. The pivotal point in the verse is marked by *καθὼς*: *even as* God in Christ has forgiven you! This is the accomplished fact of the atonement. It was necessary, as God only knew, for the awful state of sin in which man was. Freely, for Christ's sake, we now have God's forgiveness and pardon, though indeed we have not deserved such grace, or done anything to atone for our sin. This was the justifying act of God in Christ, whereby He has imputed to faith the perfect righteousness of His Son, even as Paul states: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). But it is especially the objective fact of God's justification of sinners through Christ which is being employed here by the Apostle. Lenski, however, feels that the stress is on subjective justification, as the believer receives by faith the redemption to himself, citing Rom. 3:28 as a parallel, "therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law." But this hardly fits the context as well as the objective truth that God has been reconciled to all sinful

³⁰ Stoeckhardt, p. 225.

mankind through the atonement of Christ, our Lord. This is the great truth, this is what Paul wishes to emphasize, this is what must move us to be forgiving toward all!

When we now deal equal with equal, sinner with sinner, there is only one basis on which we must proceed: forgive, as ye have been forgiven. This means the moment a man sins against us, not after he has repented, amended, and sought forgiveness. He may never do that, and yet we are to forgive him even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven all men, believer and unbeliever alike. What some men do with God's offer of forgiveness—and many there are who disdain it!—and what they do with our offer, is not the question. But we must forgive! This important truth has led Lenski to conclude: "The Christian way of settling quarrels is the easiest thing in the world. It is not that the pastor bring the two together to decide which is wronging, which is wronged, with perhaps guilt on both sides; what the degree of guilt is and how apportioned. Can the pastor act the part of God and see into their hearts? No; let him go to each separately, and see that each from the heart forgives, as God has forgiven him in Christ. Let him make each face God until any grudge in his heart is gone. Then, and not until then, let the pastor bring them together in God's name. Then, each in his heart having forgiven the other, hands and heart will go out, lips will confess any wrong which either or both have done, and the quarrel will be ended to stay ended."⁴⁰ This would appear to be sound, Scriptural procedure for every Christian counselor to follow.

⁴⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of Ephesians* (Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), p. 589.

In the strategy of the Christian in the world, in the struggle of the Christian within himself, in the charge to the church to keep the unity of the faith, the role of each believer is a key one—that he walk worthy of the calling wherewith he is called, that his faith may more and more come to be balanced by his conduct. This is the point at which, as Luther says, charity and justification by faith come together. In his *Commentary on Galatians* he writes: "We grant that we must teach also good works and charity, but it must be done in time and place, that is to say, when the question is concerning works, and toucheth not this article of justification."⁴¹ There is a proper time and place, and Paul the Apostle has eloquently asserted the cause for godly living. The modern church, and it is to be feared, the modern Christian, too, often seems to pride itself more on its bright and happy worldliness than on its spiritual growth in every grace and every way. The world must not seep into the church, or into the Christian, lest sanctification become more and more infantile, weak, and hesitant, and the witness of the Christian to the world become timid and ineffectual. Walther has expressed the prayer which might well be in the heart and on the lips of every believer, who, because of love for his Savior, is disposed to say: "Thou art mine; therefore I wish to be Thine. All that I possess, my body and my soul, my strength and my gifts, and all that I do, my entire life, shall be consecrated to Thee, to Thee alone. Lay on me any burden Thou pleasest, I shall gladly bear it. Lead me anywhere, through sorrow or joy, through good fortune or misfortune, through shame or honor, through favor of

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 141. WA 40 I, 240, 17.

men or their disfavor, grant me a long life, or should I die an early death, I shall be satisfied with anything. Lead the way, and I shall follow."⁴²

So, indeed, we might expect the apostle himself to pray, and so we might also expect him to exhort us, that we might be

⁴² Walther, pp. 77, 78.

strong disciples of the Lord. It is in Paul's terms that the charge to each Christian to do the will of the Lord can now be put. Put on the new man! Quit you like men! So the unity of the body of Christ will be preserved, and the body itself will bring about increase in every way, inwardly and outwardly.

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