



"Meditate
upon these things;
give thyself
wholly to them;
that thy profiting
may appear unto all"

I Timothy 4:15

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WHAT IS THE "VEIL OF MOSES"?

The Index of Subjects of the *Concordia Triglotta* gives four references to the "Veil of Moses." The first reference is in Article III of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, "Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law":

... The Law can only then be thus kept when the Holy Ghost is given. And Paul teaches 2 Cor. 3:15 sq., *the veil that covered the face of Moses cannot be removed except by faith in Christ, by which the Holy Ghost is received. For he speaks thus: But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.* Paul understands by the veil the human opinion concerning the entire Law, the Decalog and the ceremonies, namely, that hypocrites think that external and civil works satisfy the Law of God, and that sacrifices and observances justify before God *ex opere operato*. But when this veil is removed from us, i.e., we are freed from this error, when God shows to our hearts our uncleanness and the heinousness of sin. Then, for the first time, we see that we are far from fulfilling the Law. Then we learn to know how flesh, in security and indifference, does not fear God, and is not fully certain that we are regarded by God, but imagines that men are born and die by chance. Then we experience that we do not believe that God forgives and hears us. ...¹

The second reference is in Article V of the Epitome of the *Formula of Concord*, "Of the Law and the Gospel":

As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites who swell with the

opinion of their own righteousness as the Pharisees, or despair like Judas, Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually, Matt. 5:21ff.; Rom. 7:14. And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners [Rom. 1:18], how great it is; by this means they are directed to the Law, and then first learn from it to know aright their sins — a knowledge which Moses never could have forced out of them.

Accordingly, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath, whereby men are first led into the Law aright, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, none of which we can observe, and therefore are to seek all our righteousness in Christ: Yet ...²

The third reference is in the corresponding article in the Thorough Declaration of the *Formula of Concord*. Our quotation can be briefer:

For as the apostle testifies, 2 Cor. 3:14f., even though Moses is read, yet the veil which he put over his face is never lifted, so that they cannot understand the Law spiritually, and how great things it requires of us, and how severely it curses and condemns us because we cannot observe or fulfill it.³

The last reference is in Article VI of the Thorough Declaration:

... When they have been born anew by the Spirit of God, converted to the Lord, and thus the veil of Moses has been lifted from them, they live and walk in the Law ...⁴

The uniform understanding of the "veil of Moses" in these passages is that it is the natural man's inability to perceive the Law's real spiritual demands. This was also the view of Luther. He held that those who have the veil of Moses are those who won't look directly into the

Law to see that it completely kills, does away with all free will, and leaves nothing good in man.

Der Apostel will nicht, dasz man den Buchstab= en meiden noch seinen Tod fliehen solle, ja er klagt, dasz den Juden eine Decke über dem Gesetz hange wie vor dem Antlitz Mosis, dasz sie den Buchstaben, seinen Tod und Klarheit, nicht sehen. Er will, dasz man den Buchstaben predige und klar mache, die Decke von Mosis Angesicht thue. Das geht also so: Wer das Gesetz Mosis recht versteht und ihm ohne Decke unter die Augen sieht, der findet, dasz aller Menschen Werke Sünde sind und nichts Gutes in ihnen ist, es komme denn des Geistes Gnade in sie. Und das ist auch des Gesetzes Ende und Meinung, davon Paulus sagt: sie sehen nicht das Ende Mosis, denn es will Jedermann zum Sünder und all unser Ding zu Sünden machen, und damit uns unser Jammern, Tod und Verdienst anzeigen und in unser recht Erkenntnis führen, wie Paulus sagt Röm. 7,7.11,32. Welche nun wollen aufwerfen ihre guten Werke und rühmen den freien Willen, lassen nicht alle Menschenwerke Sünde sein, finden noch etwas Gutes in der Natur, wie die Juden und der Pabst thun: das sind die nicht wollen Mosis Angesicht lassen klar leuchten, hängen eine Decke übers Gesetz und sehen ihm nicht recht unter die Augen, wollen ihr Ding nicht Sünde noch Tod sein lassen vor Gott, d.i. sie wollen nicht recht sich erkennen noch demüthig sein, stärken ihre Hochmut selbst. Diese fliehen den Buchstaben und seinen rechten Verstand, wie die Juden Mosis Angesicht flohen; drum bleibt ihr Sinn blind und kommen noch nimmermehr zu dem Leben des Geistes. Also ist nicht möglich, dasz der das Evangelium höre und sich lasse die Gnade des Geistes lebendig machen, wer nicht will zuvor das Gesetz hören und sich den Buchstaben lassen tödten: denn die Gnade wird nicht gegeben denn allein denen, welche nach ihr dürstet. Das Leben hilft nur den Todten, die Gnade nur den Sündern, der Geist nur dem Buchstaben, und eins ohne das andere mag Niemand haben.⁵

Is this view correct? Certainly it is a Scriptural truth, properly emphasized by Luther and the Confessions,

that the natural man does not rightly understand the Law. But the question before us is whether the exegetical data permit this particular interpretation to be placed upon the veil of Moses.* The conclusion of Luther and the Confessions appears to be based on an incorrect view of what is recorded at the end of Exodus 34. The key question is this: Was, or was not, Moses wearing the veil during the time that he was addressing the Children of Israel? In verse 33 the KJV incorrectly supplies "till." The resulting sense is that Moses was wearing the veil while addressing Israel. The NASB, correctly translating the Hebrew, has it this way: "When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face." Thus he left his shining face uncovered as he spoke to the people.

Luther's own translation of v. 33 is this: "*Und wenn er solches Alles mit ihnen redete, legte er eine Decke auf sein Angesicht.*" ("And as he was speaking all these things to them, he laid a veil over his face.") Israel shrank from the clear view of the glory on Moses' face. The idea is that Moses accommodated them. From that it is but a short step to the view that we may speak of the "veil of Moses" as that which hinders a clear view of the Law, its glory, its demands, its condemnation. However Scriptural the thought is that the natural man does indeed operate with such a veil, careful examination of Ex. 34 and II Cor. 3 shows that the veil of Moses is really something quite different.

* Cf. Paragraph 48 of the *Brief Statement*: "The confessional obligation" [Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the symbols not "in so far as," but "because," the symbols agree with Scripture] "covers all doctrines, not only those that are treated *ex professo*, but also those that are merely introduced in support of other doctrines. The obligation does not extend to historical statements, 'purely exegetical questions,' and other matters not belonging to the doctrinal content of the symbols. All doctrines of the symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture." — Editor.

We gain an entirely different view of the meaning of the proceedings at Mount Sinai when we recognize that the Lord specifically arranged for Moses to leave his face unveiled during the time that he brought Israel instruction from the Law. Far from accommodating the stubborn people in their unwillingness to gaze upon the glory of the Law, the Lord through Moses compelled them to view it. If there was anything Israel needed to understand, it was the glory of the Law. They needed to take seriously the awesome holiness of their God. Would God make the effort to impress Israel with the glory of His Law by the thunders, the lightnings, the thick cloud, the loud voice of the trumpet, the smoke, the fire, and the quaking of Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16-19), and then turn around and cover the glory of Moses' face because Israel shrank from viewing it? That would be strange procedure. Continuing demonstrations of the glory of the Law were necessary. Between the original giving of the Law and the events recorded at the end of Ex. 34 came the worship of the golden calf. Israel was only too prone to disregard the Word of God. "For thou art a stiffnecked people, lest I consume thee in the way," (Ex. 33:3).

But if the veil was not designed to shield Israel from the brightness of Moses' face, representing the glory of the Law, then what was the function of the veil? Why was it necessary in the first place? For the answer we turn to II Cor. 3.

As the chapter opens, we find Paul discussing the subject of letter-writing. The procedure of the false apostles who have won a hearing in the Corinthian congregation is to go from place to place with letters of recommendation. Paul employs no such letters. The Corinthians themselves are his letter. Paul proceeds to describe the kind of letter they are, and does so in terms which take us back to Mount Sinai, thus drawing into the picture the differences between the old and the new covenants. There had been some writing done at Mount Sinai, writing on tables of stone. There is a contrasting writing being done under the new covenant, writing by the Holy Spirit upon the tablets of human hearts. Paul's objective in this section of the epistle is to glorify the Gospel ministry. The transition from the

concern of the Corinthians, letters of recommendation, to the writing being done by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, is accomplished very beautifully. From the outward Paul proceeds to the inward, from the superficial to the essential, from the physical to the spiritual. You Corinthians, he says, are yourselves a product of the miraculous writing activity of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. You are a letter of Christ. "Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart," (II Cor. 3:1-3).

Having completed the transfer to the subject of real importance, Paul now expands upon the contrast formulated briefly in v. 3. He develops more fully the differences between the old and the new covenants, all with a view to setting forth the unsurpassed and unsurpassable glory of the Gospel ministry. Ordinarily we do not associate glory with death. A great deal of ugliness easily comes to mind along with subject of death. Death brings decay; death brings sorrow. Yet, there was glory associated with the ministry of death, great glory, in fact. Again, how much are we inclined to associate glory with condemnation? Or with something that is only temporary? Yet, the ministry of condemnation, a ministry which was only temporary, came in connection with glory. The argument employed by Paul is a *fortiori*. If there was glory associated with this kind of ministry, how much more glory will be associated with the ministry which is the very opposite, a ministry of the life-giving Spirit, a ministry of righteousness, a ministry which has permanence? "But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which

was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious," (vv. 7-11).

This incomparably greater glory of the Gospel is grounds for Paul's uninterrupted forthrightness in his ministry. It is precisely at this point that Paul introduces a comparison of his actions with the actions of Moses, stressing the sharp contrast which can be observed. "Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not as Moses, who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away," (vv. 12-13, NASB).

The subject had already been alluded to in v. 7, where the very significant point was made that the glory of Moses' face was temporary. The fact that the glory on Moses' face faded away is made prominent once again in v. 13, and an understanding of this is critical. πρὸς τό expresses purpose. The action of putting on the veil had a clear purpose, the purpose of preventing the Children of Israel from looking at something. What were they to be prevented from seeing? The end of that which was passing. The glory on Moses' face faded away. Israel was to be prevented from seeing this. Hence, the wearing of the veil after Moses had finished speaking with the people.

This harmonizes beautifully with the fact, mentioned above, that God intended to impress Israel with the glory of the Law. To that end, He not only left Moses' face uncovered when he was speaking with them, but He went the additional step of having Moses cover his face at the end so that Israel would be prevented from seeing the glory of the Law fade away. Fade away it must. The Lord knew that. For the glory was temporary. But to grant Israel a vision of this now would have been to defeat His purpose. It would have detracted from the respect of Israel for the Law. It was an item of information which would only have been misused by Israel at this stage. Israel was spiritually unprepared to learn now that the glory of the Law, and along with it her special rela-

tionship to God, was but temporary. For that reason God compelled Israel to look the glory in the face when it was at its height and prevented Israel from seeing the glory fade away. Thus the brightness of the glory would remain uppermost in their minds. Note how this explanation harmonizes with the point being made by Paul that he, in contrast to Moses, uses great openness. Under the direction of God, Moses did some covering. That is something which would never take place in the Gospel ministry. There is nothing temporary or weak about it which anyone would ever want to hide.

As a rule, modern commentators recognize that Moses did not wear the veil while addressing Israel. Nevertheless, they still manifest considerable variation in their treatment of the subject.

J. P. Meyer writes: "The Children of Israel were forced to look into the brightness of Moses' face while he was delivering God's message to them. But since that brightness was a passing thing anyway, Moses veiled his face even before the glory had faded completely. The Children of Israel were to gather from this that the Law is not the final word of God. It has indeed a definite purpose in God's economy, but its function is solely preparatory. Its glory is a passing thing."⁶ Such an explanation would seem to be open to objection on two grounds: 1) Isn't it strange to lead people to a conclusion by hiding from them the fact (disappearance of the glory) which would lead them to that conclusion? If God intended Israel at this time to recognize that the glory was temporary, what need would there have been for a veil at all? Let Moses' face remain unveiled, and the complete passing of the glory would be evident to all. 2) If Moses' action of putting on a veil was designed to teach Israel and to lead her to the conclusion that the Law's glory was temporary, then the grounds for the very contrast which is here at the heart of Paul's thought, the contrast between Moses' action and his own action, disappears. Thus, if Moses was concealing something, it could not be said that he was leading Israel to an inference regarding the temporary nature of the glory of the Law. If he was using the veil to teach them, he was not really concealing anything, and there is no contrast be-

tween his procedure and the procedure of Paul.

Philip Hughes goes astray. To the key question of whether Moses was intending with the veil to hide the glory or the fading of the glory, the answer must be given that he was hiding the fading of the glory. Any other understanding of the phrase, εἰς τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταρμένου, seems forced, to mention but one difficulty. But Hughes asserts precisely the opposite. For of the interpretation that the fading of the glory was being concealed, he writes: "It is an interpretation which confuses the issue at this stage in Paul's argument by proposing that it was not the glory but the fading of the glory which Moses was intent on hiding from the people." In further explaining himself, he writes: "We understand Paul to mean, therefore, that Moses placed a veil over his face so that the people might not gaze right to the end of the glory which was passing away, that is, that they might not behold it without interruption or concealment." "And so Moses used to veil his face when he had done speaking with them — not so much for the convenience of the people as to show them, by a kind of enacted parable, that it was their iniquities which rendered them unable, and unworthy, to behold such glory."⁷ But even if we conceded that a veil, rather than the continuously unveiled glory, was the best device for impressing upon the people their unworthiness to behold such glory, we are confronted, not only with the difficulty that this again weakens the contrast between Moses and Paul, but above all with the difficulty that we find ourselves dealing with a veil with which one ought to continue to operate! One ought to be commended; and not reprov- ed for blindness, for operating with a veil which offers parabolic instruction of our unworthiness before the Law. The argument that we dare not make Moses or God party to the act of concealing the passing of the glory has little weight. God has the right to do as He chooses. And He knows the best methods to employ in instructing a nation.

Lenski goes astray when he takes πρὸς τό as indicating result. "So we submit the question whether here we do not have result: 'so that the sons of Israel did not get to look earnestly on the end of what was being done away with, but got their thoughts hardened.'" According

to Lenski, Moses' repeated action of putting on the veil emphasized "this coming to an end, this being done away with, so that another, greater than Moses, might come and speak ..." "A result clause would state the tragic fact that all this was lost upon the Israelites, the ἄλλὰ clause adding that they were hardened."⁸ This again reverses the function of the veil, destroy's Paul's contrast, and makes of the veil something one should continue to use.

Note that similar difficulties arise with all three commentators. Wouldn't it have to be said of Meyer's veil also that it is one with which one ought to continue to operate? Recourse is therefore had to a double significance of the veiling. Meyer, for example, writes: "... The same veil, which symbolized the passing of the glory, and at the same time hid its end from the eyes of the people, remains unlifted ..." ⁹ And Hughes speaks of an additional veil symbolized by Moses' veil: "Paul introduces a bold transference of thought when he affirms that the same veil remains when the old covenant is read; but he is fully justified in doing so because he is thinking historically: the placing by Moses of a veil over his face was in itself an action symbolical of the veil of rebellion and unbelief which curtained the hearts of the people from the true apprehension of God's glory."¹⁰ But aren't these unnecessary complications? A single purpose of the veil is given in v. 13: to conceal the passing of the glory from Israel. And that same veil is referred to in v. 14.

We proceed to v. 14: "But their minds were hardened." The contrast expressed by ἄλλὰ confronts us with an apparent difficulty. That Israel is still operating with the same veil is explained as being a great spiritual tragedy. But how can it be a tragedy if the Lord Himself introduced the use of the veil? How can Israel be chided for employing something, the use of which He Himself introduced? If God Himself chose to withhold from their vision at the inception of their national history the fading of the glory of the Law, how can they be blamed for continuing to have their vision centered upon the Law and for failing to see the temporary nature of its glory? How can it be a hardening of the mind to fol-

low in a pattern of thinking which the Lord Himself apparently indicated? These are questions that we might ask as we are confronted with the puzzling contrast: "But their minds were hardened."

The problem finds its solution in a consideration of the development of Israel's history. What God for good reason concealed from Israel at Mount Sinai, the temporary glory of the Law and the temporary nature of Israel's special relationship to God, was revealed in due time and ever more clearly and powerfully to all who would ponder the oracles of their God. Extremely helpful in this regard is an article by Prof. August Pieper, "*Die Decke Moses*,"¹¹ wherein he discusses at some length and with special reference to God's Old Testament dealings with Israel the employment of proper disciplinary, educative methods in accordance with the age, maturity, receptivity, and capacity of the one being trained.

Let us take note of the main points of the article. In first discussing the passage in Ex. 34, Pieper cites as inaccurate the translations of Luther and the KJV.¹² Expanding on Galatians 4:1-3, he points out that one does not overwhelm a child who is not of age with everything there is to know about a subject all at once. Israel must first learn some obedience, in order that the Lord might lead them deeper into His Law and Gospel. How could Israel perceive at the outset that their covenant with God was temporary? And if they had, how would they have responded to any further instruction? God would reveal to them from their own history the justification for their eventual fate as a nation. What was concealed at Sinai would not remain concealed. Already Moses in his last days spoke clearly of impending judgment. And the prophets spoke ever more clearly of the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new. At the end of the article Pieper follows the course of thought through the last part of chapter 3 and even on into the beginning of chapter 4 of II Corinthians.

Thus any studious Jew could and should know the score, and God's further Old Testament revelation is Paul's justification for charging Israel with hardness in not perceiving the glory of the Law as temporary. All

this wealth of Old Testament background is implied in Paul's argument and serves broadly as grounds for the contrast express in the ἁλλά, a conjunction which would otherwise seem quite out of place. The argumentation would not be coherent without presupposing such historical background, from which alone we can understand that it was truly a hardening to continue to operate with the veil of Moses, though God Himself first caused Moses to wear the veil. An apparent difficulty accompanying our exegesis is thus removed.

Worth pondering on the connection of v. 14 with the preceding verses is the statement in Meyer's Commentary: "Flatt, Rückert, de Wette, Hofmann (comp. also Olshausen) take the connection rightly, *that over against the utterance treating of the holders of the apostolic office, ver 12f., stands, that which speaks of Israel.* Accordingly ἁλλά is *at, nevertheless.*"¹³ And Bernard Weiss writes: "But however boldly the servants of the gospel proclaim that with their service the end of the service of the law has come, the children of Israel do not to the present day understand this."¹⁴ Bachmann's discussion in Zahn's Commentary gets a little more involved. The kind of connection made by the above commentators is rejected on the grounds that the aorist (ἐπαρώθη) will not permit it. "Der Versuch hinwiederum, das ἁλλά mit der ganzen Aussage von 12 in Beziehung zu setzen (wir reden in voller Offenheit, aber die Sinne der Kinder Israel sind verstockt — so Hofm., Olsh., Ruck.), scheitert an dem aoristischen, also ein Ereignis der Vergangenheit benennenden Tempus."¹⁵

Bachmann puts forth the view that there was a conflict between the action or intention of Moses and the end result of what he did, a conflict which not only serves to heighten the contrast with the New Testament παρησία, but which also should have been discernible to the spiritual understanding and which therefore serves as ground for the ἁλλά. "... Sondern Mose wollte den Glanz verhüllen, aber was er tatsäc h l i c h verhüllte, war — vermöge einer höheren Ordnung der Dinge — τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταργουμένου. ... Für 12 und die dort behauptete παρησία ergibt sich dabei rückwirkend erneut der Gedanke, dass diese im Neuen Bunde wohl am Platze sei, weil sie hier nicht Gefahr laufe, durch den tatsäc h=

lichen Verlauf der Dinge in ähnlicher Weise ironisiert zu werden , wie das Mose widerfahren war. ... Pl hat jetzt den Widerspruch zwischen dem Verfahren des Mose und der wirklichen Qualität seiner Sache aufgedeckt. Dieser Widerspruch hätte geschärftem Geistesvermögen schon damals erkennbar werden sollen. Aber da fehlte es ..."16

Intriguing as this view is, and perhaps free of certain difficulties inherent in other explanations, the assumption of such a conflict does not commend itself and appears to force too much into the simple statement of v. 13. Is there any compelling reason against taking the aorist, ἐπαρώθη, as summing up a lengthy development? No particular point in the past need be in view. As grounds for the statement regarding the hardening, Paul himself goes on: "For until this very day the same veil ..." From the events at Sinai Paul moves easily to the present state of affairs, which is evidence for the hardening which developed in the intervening period of time.

A few comments on v. 14 might be in order. The NASB translates: "For until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ." This translation assumes an immediate connection between μένει and μὴ ἀρακαλυπτόμενον. But it is superfluous to add μὴ ἀρακαλυπτόμενον to μένει, which stands quite ably on its own feet. The KJV has a similar translation but divides ὅτι and takes it as a relative pronoun. Beck translates in this way: "To this day the same veil is still there on the reading of the old covenant and isn't taken away, because it is put away only in Christ." And the NIV translates: "... For to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away." Both of these translations are based on the separation of μένει from μὴ ἀρακαλυπτόμενον. (Note how the NIV even begins a new sentence at that point.) ἀρακαλυπτόμενον is translated as "taken away" or "removed," and the ὅτι is construed as causal. Although a more plausible way of reading the sentence, this alternative, too, must be rejected, chiefly because it still leaves us with a superfluous μὴ ἀρακαλυπτόμενον; it requires that καταργεῖται refer to the veil, which would be an un-

expected combination; and it requires something in the Greek to express the "only" which both Beck and the NIV feel compelled to employ. We are left with the construction found in the margin of the NASB: "... The same veil remains, it not being revealed that it is done away in Christ." Unfortunately, this does not make it clear that what is here referred to as being "done away" is not the veil but the old covenant. However, this translation correctly assumes a declarative ὅτι.¹⁷

Having adopted this construction, we note the continuity in the course of thought. The end of the old covenant is the primary consideration. It was temporarily concealed by God, to be sure. But Paul expresses his dismay that despite all intervening instruction, the abrogation of that old covenant has still not been revealed to them. The folly of using the very same veil to continue concealing the end of the old covenant even after Christ has come is absolutely inexcusable. Indeed, what a hardening has set in!

Thus Israel continued to operate with the veil of Moses even after the Lord had removed it through further revelation. They insisted on fixing their gaze only upon the Law and viewed their relationship to God only in terms of the Law. They refused to believe that the Sinaitic covenant was temporary. They dismissed the prophecies of future national judgment. In spite of all the warnings of Jesus (cf. Mt. 23 and 24), they awaited a miraculous deliverance from God even at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. They would not hear of God's dealings with the Gentiles (cf. Acts 22: 21-22). They fought with might and main against the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles.

But above all, they looked upon the Law as their means of salvation. It goes without saying that the Lord's original use of the veil was not intended to magnify the Law as a way of salvation, to undermine the truth of the spiritual abrogation of the Law, or in any way to direct men's minds away from Christ. Its purpose was to promote the Gospel, not to detract from it. How sad that Israel extended the use of the veil even far beyond the restricted realm of significance into which it

was originally introduced. They refused to see the impotence of the Law as a means of salvation. The Law's disappearance in the obtaining of salvation was hidden from them. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God," (Rom. 10:3).

Thus, according to the view of the veil of Moses found in our Confessions, Israel did not look at the Law long enough or hard enough. According to II Cor. 3, Israel looked at the Law too long. There is, however, no doctrinal discrepancy. For if Israel had begun by viewing the Law intently, they never would have kept it in view permanently. Their superficial and careless view prevented them from ever terminating their view at all by turning to the Gospel. Their failure to look long and hard at the outset resulted in the error of looking at the Law endlessly as their way of salvation.

What, then, is the "Veil of Moses"? To operate with the "Veil of Moses" is to operate with the idea that the Law is God's only covenant with man. It is to operate with the idea that salvation comes by the Law. It is to fail to see that the Law gives way to the Gospel in salvation. This veil, permitting only preoccupation with the Law, lies over the vision and heart of the natural man. It is a veil which is removed only when the Holy Spirit enlightens us through the Gospel.

We have but touched on a few of the high points in this very rich chapter in a very rich epistle. Perhaps we have thereby helped to clear the way for fruitful meditation on the theme so prominent throughout these chapters: the unending glory of the Gospel ministry. May we though such meditation derive rich encouragement for the work to which the Holy Spirit has called us. May the Spirit ever continue to remove from us the veil of Moses. May He lead us to appreciate the surpassing, unending glory of the Gospel and the rich freedom it brings. May He inspire us with confidence, so that in the work of the ministry we use great frankness, thereby opening up to others the treasures of the Gospel and bringing them peace in the very depths of their conscience.

R. Wehrwein

FOOTNOTES

1. *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), *Apology*, p. 159.
2. *Ibid.*, *Formula of Concord*, p. 803.
3. *Ibid.*, *FC*, p. 955.
4. *Ibid.*, *FC*, p. 963.
5. *Luthers Episteln — Auslegung, Ein Commentar zur Apostelgeschichte, den apostolischen Briefen und der Offenbarung, Aus seinen homiletischen und exegetischen Werken, herausgegeben von Chr. Eberle, Stuttgart, 1866, pp. 388-389.* "The apostle does not desire that one should avoid the letter or flee its death. In fact, he complains that for the Jews a veil hangs over the Law as it did before the face of Moses, so that they do not see the letter, its death and clarity. He desires that one should preach the Law and explain it, removing the veil from Moses' face. That happens in this way: Whoever rightly understands the Law of Moses and views it without a veil right before his eyes finds that the works of all men are sin and that there is nothing good in them unless the grace of the Spirit enters them. And that is also the end and meaning of the Law, of which Paul says: They do not see the end of Moses, for it aims to reduce everyone to sinners and all our efforts to sins and thereby to demonstrate to us our misery, death, and just deserts and really to bring all this home to us, as Paul says in Rom. 7:7 and 11:32. But now the ones who wish to hold up their good works and to boast of free will, who do not permit all human works to be sin, who still find something good in our nature, as do the Jews and the Pope — such are the ones who refuse to permit Moses' face to shine clearly. They hang a veil over the Law and do not examine it right before their eyes. They are not willing to have their efforts reduced to sin and death before God, that is, they are not willing to have a correct understanding of themselves or to be humble, but themselves strengthen their pride. These flee the letter and its correct understanding, just as the Jews fled Moses' face. Therefore their mind remains blind and they never come to the life of the Spirit. Thus it is not possible for one who will not first hear

the Law and who refuses to be killed by the letter to hear the Gospel and have the grace of the Spirit make him alive. For grace is not given except to those who thirst after it. Life helps only the dead, grace only sinners, the Spirit only the letter, and no one may have one without the other."

6. Prof. J. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1963), pp. 57-58.
7. Philip Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, from *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, F. F. Bruce, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 108-109.
8. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First & Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), pp. 964-965.
9. Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
10. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
11. Prof. August Pieper, "Die Decke Moses, ein Zwischenstück in der Geschichte der 'Herrlichkeit des Herrn,'" *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 31, No. 1, January, 1934, pp. 1-18.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
13. H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistles to the Corinthians*, translated from the 5th German edition, the translation revised and edited by William P. Dickson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1890), p. 473.
14. Bernhard Weiss, *A Commentary on the New Testament* (four volumes), translated by George Schodde and Epiphanius Wilson, Vol. III, Romans to Colossians (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906), p. 300.
15. Philip Bachmann, "Der zweite Brief des Paulus an die Korinther" (Vol. VIII, "Kommentar zum Neuen Testament," herausgegeben von Theodor Zahn, Leipzig, 1909), p. 165.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 164 and 165.
17. Cf. Bachmann, *op. cit.*, for penetrating comments on this verse.



TOPICS ON THE TENSES . . .

TRANSLATING THE AORIST INDICATIVE

In the first article of this series (September, 1976), a plea was made to "keep the aorist in its place." The exegete will do this if he but remembers that this tense points in simple fashion to an action without describing it in any way. When a commentator finds in the aorist tense of a verb form such forces as "once-and-for-all," "sudden," or "momentary," he is reading into the tense something that can be derived only from the meaning of the verb stem or from the context. A second article (March, 1978) discussed the three points of view of the aorist. Partly because of the distinctive meanings of various verb stems, the aorist may view an action from different angles: 1) it may look at an action in its undivided entirety (constative or summary), 2) it may point to the beginning of an action or state (ingressive), or 3) it may focus upon the completion of the action (effective).

A brief discussion of the translation of the Greek aorist into English would seem to be in place at this point. For the sake of simplicity this discussion will be limited to the indicative mode. From the outset it must be remembered that there is, unfortunately, no one-to-one correspondence between the tenses of Greek and those of English. The chief problem for the translator lies in the fact that the Greek tenses have to do properly with kind of action. While an element of time is present in the indicative mode, it is to be regarded as a secondary element. In the English tenses, on the other hand, the focus of attention is on the time expressed by the verb.

How is the translator of the New Testament to deal with this situation? In rendering each verb he must acquaint himself with the force of the Greek tense, consider the meaning of the verb stem, and take note of the context in which the verb is found. Then he must select an English verb which will convey as closely as possible the meaning of the original, without becoming wooden or

stiff. The task is not always easy or completely successful. Compare, for example, how the NASB found it necessary to employ the English perfect tense for three different tenses in the Greek in the following passages from I John: 1) In 1:3: "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also." The Greek has perfect tense forms (ἑώρακαμεν, ἀκηκόαμεν), expressing completed action followed by abiding results. The disciples' physical seeing and hearing of the Word of Life, Jesus Christ, was a completed thing, for He had now ascended into heaven. Yet the scenes of His public ministry were still very much before their eyes, and the words of eternal life which He uttered were still sounding, as it were, in their ears. 2) In 2:7: "Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning." The Greek has an imperfect tense here (εἴχετε), expressing linear or durative action. The NASB reflects more accurately the force of the Greek in its marginal note: "Lit., were having," but did not choose this more literal translation because it is hardly idiomatic English. 3) Again in 2:7: "The old commandment is the word which you have heard." The Greek has an aorist (ἠκούσατε), which simply points to the hearing as an act that has occurred. The NASB rendering with an English perfect can be defended, as will be seen below.

The foregoing illustration indicates how difficult it is, if not impossible, to find distinctive English translations for the various Greek tenses. This is true even of a version, such as the NASB, which has striven for accuracy and consistency in rendering the Greek tenses into English.

ENGLISH PAST FOR AORIST INDICATIVE

In the large majority of cases, a Greek aorist indicative can be rendered adequately by an English past tense. Compare Acts 2:2-4 (NASB is used here and throughout the remainder of this article, except as indicated): "And suddenly there came (ἐγένετο) from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled (ἐπλήρωσεν) the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared (ὤφθησαν) to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested (ἐκάθυσεν) on each

of them. And they were all filled (ἐπλήσθησαν) with the Holy Spirit and began (ἤρξαντο) to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving (Greek imperfect) them utterance."

The English past, as Burton points out, "is used of any past action between which and the moment of speaking an interval is thought of as existing. It affirms nothing respecting existing result."¹ This usage lies within that of the Greek aorist.

ENGLISH PERFECT FOR There are times, however, when
AORIST INDICATIVE the Greek aorist indicative is
used for events in the past between which and the time of speaking the speaker does not wish to indicate an interval. The events are pointed to simply as having occurred. The English perfect tense, with its auxiliaries "have" and "has," can well be used for such aorists. The example from I John 2:7 cited above is a case in point: "The old commandment is the word which you have heard." If the NASB had rendered this aorist "the word which you heard," the English reader might have wondered: "Of what particular occasion in the past was the holy writer thinking?" But John was not pointing his readers to some specific event in the past; he was merely stating the fact that they had heard the word. The translation "which you have heard" is therefore appropriate.

Many other examples could be given, some in which the event continues up to the time of speaking, so that there is actually no interval at all. Matthew 27:8 is an apt illustration: "For this reason that field has been called (ἐκλήθη) the Field of Blood to this day." It would obviously give a wrong sense to render it with an English past: "was called." In other passages the event spoken of is so recent as to make the thought of an interval seem unnatural. Compare Acts 7:52: "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become (ἐγένεσθε)." Again, the time of the event may be entirely indefinite, as in Matthew 19:4: "Have you not read (ἀνέγνωτε), that He who created them from the

beginning made them male and female?" Or the verb may refer to a series of events which extends approximately to the time of speaking. Compare Matthew 5:21: "You have heard (ἠκούσατε, referring probably to frequent occasions in the synagogue) that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder.'"2

We may include in the foregoing usage the dramatic aorist, as defined by Robertson,³ which is employed in Greek to express what has just taken place. In Matthew 9:18 Jairus says to Jesus: "My daughter has just died (ἐτελεύτησεν)." Another of many examples in the New Testament is Mark 16:6: "He has risen (ἠγέρθη); He is not here."

Offhand, one may think that the English perfect is more appropriate for the Greek perfect than for the aorist. But it must be remembered that in common English usage the perfect tense does not in itself indicate the existence of abiding results from some completed action, which is the force of the Greek perfect. One book on English composition states: "The present perfect tense denotes being or action barely finished in the recent past and conceivably having effects that flow into the present."⁴ An existing effect of a completed action is suggested in a sentence like the following: "The sky has clouded over." But no such abiding results are indicated in sentences like "Many students have played basketball during the school year" and "He has often apologized for being late." Here the English perfect is used for actions recently performed, without interposing an interval of time between the actions and the time of speaking, and without indicating presently existing results. This usage of the English perfect is very similar to the usage of the Greek aorist which is under consideration in this section.

In the second article of this series, it was mentioned that the English perfect is frequently appropriate in rendering the effective aorist. This will be true at least whenever it is evident that the speaker does not wish to express an interval between the attainment of some attempted action and the time of speaking. Compare Matthew 25:20: "Master, you entrusted five talents to

me; see, I have gained (ἐκέροισα) five more talents."

ENGLISH PAST PERFECT
FOR AORIST INDICATIVE

The Greek past perfect (pluperfect) tense is used only rarely in the New Testament, and then only to express a completed action with results existing up to some point in the past as indicated by the context. The English past perfect does not in itself indicate such existing results. It denotes merely "being or action finished at a time in the past before another time in the past."⁵ The Greeks cared little or nothing about such relative time,⁶ and simply employed the aorist for both events. When we translate such aorists into English, we may indicate sequence by using the past perfect for the earlier of the two past events.

Many examples can be found in the English versions to illustrate this. Compare Matthew 2:16: "Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked (ἐνεπαύχθη) by the magi, he became very enraged"; John 19:30: "When Jesus therefore had received (ἔλαβεν) the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!'" ; Acts 1:2: "... until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen (ἐξελέξατο)."

In accord with the principles of indirect discourse in Greek and in English, an aorist indicative in indirect discourse after a verb of past time is similarly rendered into English by a past perfect. Thus Luke 8:47: "And when the woman saw that she had not escaped notice (ἐλαθεν), she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched (ἥψατο) Him, and how she had been immediately healed (ἰάθη)."

ENGLISH PRESENT FOR
AORIST INDICATIVE

At times the translator will have to employ an English present tense in rendering a Greek aorist indicative — in spite of the augment and secondary endings, which normally indicate past time. The English present is required for gnomic aorists, which express universal or timeless truths. In John 15:6 the NASB translates as a gnomic aorist: "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown (ἐβλήθη) away as a branch, and dries up (ἐξηράνθη);

and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." (The last three verbs are present tense in Greek.) Likewise I Peter 1:24: "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers (ἐξηρανώθη), And the flower falls off (ἐξέπεσεν), But the word of the Lord abides (present tense in Greek) forever." Chamberlain adds: "These truths could have been expressed by the gnomic present (linear), but the aorist seems to state the truth more abruptly and startlingly."⁷

The English present tense may be used also for the so-called epistolary aorist. In this Greek idiom the writer puts himself into the position of his readers and looks back on the time of his writing as a past event. In I John 2:12-14 we find the present tense γράφω used three times, followed by the aorist ἔγραφα, again used three times. Assuming that these are epistolary aorists,⁸ one may translate all six verbs with an English present tense "I am writing." Yet we should recognize that the English perfect is an acceptable idiom for rendering an epistolary aorist. Thus the NASB in this passage: "I am writing (for the three Greek presents) ... I have written (for the three Greek aorists) ..." Compare how we may state in a letter either "I am writing this ..." or "I have written this ..." with a difference only in the viewpoint. The Greek verb πέμπω is similarly employed in the New Testament as an epistolary aorist. In Ephesians 6:22 Paul says of Tychicus, the bearer of the letter: "I have sent (ἔπεμψα) him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts." We may also translate: "I am sending him to you."

Because of the peculiar force of the aorist (to point to an action without describing it), it may be employed also for completed actions which have abiding results — for which the Greek perfect would be appropriate, had the writer wished to stress perfective action. When the aorist is thus used, we may at times render it effectively with a present tense in English. The NASB has done this on occasion. In John 7:26 we find: "The rulers do not really know (ἐγνώσαν) that this is the Christ, do they?"; and in II Corinthians 5:13: "For if we are be-

side ourselves (ἐξέστημεν), it is for God; if we are of sound mind (present tense in Greek), it is for you." The NIV has chosen to render the first of these passages with an English perfect: "Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ?"

Some grammarians speak also about a proleptic or futuristic aorist, occurring with some actual or implied condition for the future. Since, however, it is not necessary to use an English future tense to render this Greek idiom, it will not be discussed separately here.

In view of what has been presented in the foregoing paragraphs, we will surely appreciate Robertson's words of caution and advice as he concludes his discussion of the aorist indicative:

The Greek aorist ind., as can be readily seen, is not the exact equivalent of any tense in any other language. It has nuances all its own, many of them difficult or well-nigh impossible to reproduce in English. Here, as everywhere, one needs to keep a sharp line between the Greek idiom and its translation into English. We merely do the best that we can in English to translate in one way or another the total result of word (*Aktionsart*), context and tense. ... The Greek aorist and the English past do not exactly correspond, nor do the Greek perfect and the English perfect. The Greek aorist covers much more ground than the English past. ... From the Greek point of view the aorist is true to its own genius. The aorist in Greek is so rich in meaning that the English labours and groans to express it. As a matter of fact the Greek aorist is translatable into almost every English tense except the imperfect, but that fact indicates no confusion in the Greek.⁹

C. Kuehne

FOOTNOTES

1. Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898), p. 25. Burton's entire discussion on

- pp. 23-31 is helpful, although it may in places lack some of the precision that modern-day grammarians desire.
2. This paragraph is based largely upon Burton, *op. cit.*, p. 26f.
 3. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 841ff.
 4. Charles H. Vivian and Bernetta M. Jackson, *English Composition* (Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 268.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
 6. William Douglas Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 78.
 7. *Ibid.*
 8. For a listing of other exegetical options for this passage, cf. C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), p. 12.
 9. Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 847f.



SPECIAL BLESSINGS OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE

In the March, 1978, issue of this journal we enumerated some of the "Special Dangers Facing a Pastor." When the Lord God called Moses into the work of the ministry and he gave thought to what this would mean, we are not too surprised to hear him offering many excuses to try to get out of it, (Ex. 3 and 4). The prophet Jeremiah, too, was overwhelmed when the Lord called him to become His prophet. He said: "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child," (Jer. 1:6). We think of faithful John the Baptist in his dealings with King Herod. As long as John preached only the sweet doctrine of the coming Messiah, the ungodly king was pleased to listen to him. But when John admonished him for living in adultery, this proclamation of God's will cost John his life. When we consider all the temptations and afflictions which come to those who are faithful in the proclamation of God's Word, our flesh is tempted to leave this work to someone else, while we seek out an occupation that is more profitable in this world's goods, and which does not have such heavy responsibilities as guiding souls along the narrow path to heaven.

But we would be remiss to drop the subject at this point, without presenting the "other side of the coin." The Holy Spirit tells us through the Apostle Paul: "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," (I Tim. 3:1). No other calling on earth has been given a higher assignment. And no other calling promises greater personal blessings. It is to these blessings that we now wish to direct our attention. Obviously, we have in mind spiritual, not earthly, blessings.

The pastoral office, when carried out according to God's will, necessarily causes one to be much occupied with God's Word. After the seven deacons were chosen in the early Church, the twelve apostles could give themselves continually to prayer, and to "the ministry of the Word," (Acts 6:4). Surely we can see the great blessing our Lord affords us when He calls us to an office, the chief duty of which involves the study of His

Holy Word. Paul writes to Timothy: "Give attendance to reading," (I Tim. 4:13). Reading what? There can be no doubt but that he has the Scriptures in mind. The Lord told Joshua: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein," (Josh. 1:8). The Word of God is to be the daily food of his soul. What a blessed privilege that is!

But to "give attendance to reading" means more than casual reading. Surely all Christians are exhorted to "search the Scriptures," (John 5:39). The Berean Christians did just that. Having heard Paul preach, they "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so," (Acts 17:11). But the pastor especially should so occupy himself with God's Word that his knowledge of Scriptural truths becomes ever clearer and fuller. He should be able to apply God's Word readily to the manifold occasions that arise. His study of God's Word should surely take precedence over mere human writings. At pastoral conferences there is no more important business than an edifying study of God's Word. It is unthinkable that a pastoral conference should give first priority to social and political issues of the day, while relegating to the background a study of that Word of God which they are called to proclaim.

Such constant occupation with God's Word is rich in blessing. Paul writes: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," (II Tim. 3:16). And to the Romans Paul writes: "Whatever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope," (Rom. 15:4). The more we busy ourselves with God's Word, the more at home we will be in those eternal truths which God has revealed for our everlasting well-being. We will be able to provide answers to questions which the worldly-wise cannot give, such as: Who is God? How is God minded toward us? Why are we here? Where did sin and pain and misfortune and death come from, and why? Is there a hereafter? If there is a life after death, how do we get there? In this way we soon find that the study of theology is pro-

fitable for doctrine.

The study of Scripture is also profitable for re-proof, (πρὸς ἐλεγμὸν), that is, the exposing of error, the "showing what is wrong" (Beck's *American Translation*). When a person is at home in Scripture, he can put doctrines to a test. He will recognize false doctrines. The Psalmist says: "Through Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way," (Ps. 119: 104). A person who is at home in God's Word will not waver with every doctrinal wind that blows, seeking out the nearest fence on which to sit when doctrinal controversy arises. What a blessing it is, in this world of indecision and doubt, to have solid ground on which to stand! What a blessing we Lutheran pastors enjoy, to be so occupied with God's Word that we can actually be certain of the truth, and are able to distinguish the countless errors which surround us.

St. Paul also says that Scripture is profitable for correction (πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν), (II Tim. 3:16). Luther: "*zur Besserung*." Beck: "improving." God's Word serves to improve corrupt man. We surely know how holy Scripture does this. It does not give all kinds of moral precepts to man who is spiritually dead, and which he is simply unable to observe. In order to "improve" sinful man, Scripture places the divine Law before him as a mirror, so that he can see his sinfulness in the sight of God. Then in the Gospel Scripture points him to the Savior and works faith in his heart. The pastor's constant occupation with God's Word serves to remind him over and over again to put no trust in himself, but to flee ever and again to Jesus, the Savior of sinners.

Closely connected with this "improving" is the next thought: for instruction in righteousness (πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ). Beck: "training in right living." God's Word trains a person to lead a righteous and holy life. Scripture has a sufficient answer to every question regarding man's conduct toward God. As often as we pastors are occupied with this Word, we are continually being instructed as to how we should conduct ourselves, how we may show and prove our faith. God's Word instructs us in all Christian virtues: Christian and brotherly

love, humility, gentleness, peace-loving, mercy, generosity, heavenly-mindedness, chastity, moderation in all things, patience in bearing a cross, and caution in the use of Christian liberty. God's Word instructs us in every aspect of God-pleasing conduct. It tells us that we preachers are to be "ensamples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:3) in all these things, letting the light of our own godly example show the way for our people.

God's Word clearly shows not only our Christian duties, but also our pastoral duties: teaching, preaching, caring for souls, watching over them, praying and fighting for those entrusted to us. Suppose that a pastor is getting to be a little careless in some aspect of his work. Then he goes to a pastoral conference at which an essay is presented on that very matter. The Word of God which he has heard troubles his conscience, with the result that he resolves to seek God's help in carrying out more faithfully that particular portion of his pastoral work. Such constant "instruction in righteousness" is a big benefit of his occupation with the Word of God. As Paul wrote: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning."

God's Word continually comforts us. "That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." We preachers, too, constantly need the comfort of God's Word. Above all, we need comfort in view of the sins which still cling to us. Until the day of our death we will remain weak and frail men, poor sinners just like the members of our congregations, sinning much every day. We need rich comfort if we are going to open the eyes of others to an understanding of man's sinful corruption. So it is that we preachers must be aware of the fact that this earth is a vale of tears because of sin, that there is much distress and anxiety and tribulation and sickness and death, that there are countless evils that afflict both body and soul. In addition, we have a cross to bear. Jesus speaks of this: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me," (Matt. 16:24). Paul writes: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," (II Tim. 3:12). Again: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God," (Acts 14:22). All

these things we are to understand and experience, so that we may be able to guide our people along the narrow path to heaven.

We pastors not only become partakers of the general tribulations which come upon all people, or of the special tribulations which come upon all of God's children, but we also have a special cross which comes upon us because of our office. We shall say more about this presently. Throughout all of this, the world has no real comfort to offer us, nor will we find it within ourselves. But as we diligently occupy ourselves with God's Word, we will find a continuous source of needed comfort. We have previously cited Rom. 15:4, which refers back especially to the Old Testament writings. Especially in the Psalms do we find the comfort we need. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul," (Ps. 94:19). "This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy Word hath quickened me," (Ps. 119:50). "Unless Thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction," (Ps. 119:92). King Hezekiah said: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption," (Isa. 38:17) namely, through the Word which the Lord had spoken by the prophet Isaiah. Jeremiah said: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart," (Jer. 15:16). And Paul writes: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God," (II Cor. 1:3-4).

God comforts us through His Word. Scripture is rich in comfort because it is given to us by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Who is our Comforter. Let us busily occupy ourselves with the comforting Word of God. Let us fill ourselves with the rich comfort it offers. There are no wounds for which it does not provide balm and ointment. How very fortunate and blessed we are, to be so occupied with God's Word that we may constantly experience the comfort we need and which it offers!

By now we can see that the chief blessing which we enjoy in our pastoral office is the Word of God, with which we are busily occupied. Through our studies, we obtain a good knowledge of God's Word. And what belongs to such knowledge? The study of God's Word brings us, first of all, to a clear knowledge of God's Law. Natural man has no real understanding of the Law, even though it has been written in his heart. The knowledge which the heathen have is limited to a few commandments of the Second Table, and consists in doing a few outward works and avoiding certain coarse sins and vices. Natural man's knowledge of God's Law is so slight that he often thinks that he can be saved by keeping the Law. What a great blessing and advantage it is to have a good knowledge of the Law, to know that God in His Law does not merely forbid the coarse, outward sins, but also the secret, hidden sinful thoughts and desires of the heart; or that God does not require only outward good works, but that He requires a perfectly pure and holy heart. The more deeply we penetrate into a spiritual understanding of the Law, the more easily will we recognize our sinfulness and our inability to become righteous before God and be saved by the Law. Every day we will flee anew to Christ, receiving of Him "grace for grace," (John 1:16). How very important it is, therefore, to remain a believing Christian, to have a right understanding of the Law, and to use it every day as a mirror.

A further blessing rests in the knowledge of God's Law as a rule. We Christians continually need God's Law, to show us ever anew the will of God, so that we may recognize what truly good works are in His sight. To be sure, insofar as we are regenerate Christians and have a new heart, we know God's will and do according to it without any outward law and command. God has put His Law in our inward parts and written it in our hearts, (Jer. 31:33). But the Christian still has also the Old Adam within him. This Old Adam is blind to God's will and remains so. If we do not keep close watch over ourselves, we will easily go off on the path of error and try to please God with works of our own choosing. Every Christian knows this from his own bitter experiences. We can see this also in the case of the heterodox. We need only recall the monks of the Roman Church, with all their

self-chosen works. We think of the so-called Enthusiasts of Luther's day, of the prohibitionists, etc. What a great blessing it is, therefore, when we preachers possess a good knowledge of the will of God. We can say with all certainty: This is God's will!

But the chief blessing which we have in our office, as a result of diligent occupation with God's Word, is a good knowledge of the Gospel. A deep knowledge of the Law will do us no good without a clear and true knowledge of the Gospel. Without a knowledge of the Gospel, the knowledge of the Law will only lead man to despair, for "the letter killeth," (II Cor. 3:6). What a wonderfully gracious blessing it is, that we have know also the Gospel! When we have only the Law, then we know that God is holy and righteous and that He punishes sin. But we do not know how to become reconciled with God. With only a knowledge of God's wrath and curse upon sin, we would be eternally lost. How we must thank God, that we know also the Gospel of Christ, and the gracious forgiveness of sins which is ours through faith in Him!

The next step in our knowledge of God's Word is the distinction between Law and Gospel. This knowledge leads us to the awareness that in the Law God demands and threatens and condemns us sinners. But then in the Gospel God graciously announces a Savior, and speaks of the forgiveness of sins and salvation in Him. So we know that when God demands and threatens and condemns, that is the preaching of the Law, and that is not His last word. Thereby He wants us to see ourselves as we are, in our natural, sinful corruption. But when God speaks to us in the Gospel and assures us of the forgiveness of sins and salvation in Christ, then this is His last word! It is through this knowledge, of distinguishing between Law and Gospel, that we are and remain Christians. Paul wrote to the Galatians: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the Law; ye are fallen from grace," (Gal. 5:4). What a blessing it is that we, through diligent occupation with God's Word in our office as pastors, have learned this art of distinguishing between Law and Gospel!

Our study of God's Word brings us to a knowledge of

the doctrine of justification. Paul presents this doctrine in II Cor. 5:19: "... God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;" and in Rom. 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law." We are justified without any of those things which God requires of us in any of the Ten Commandments. Instead, we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," (Rom. 3:24). That is, in brief, the doctrine of justification. We Lutheran pastors have a good knowledge of this doctrine. We are ready to defend it against all opposition. What a wonderful blessing to have this central teaching in all Scripture dwelling so richly in our hearts! When Satan tries to raise doubts in our minds concerning our salvation because of the greatness of our sins, then the doctrine of justification tells us that there is a grace of God without the deeds of the Law. Surely a good knowledge of this doctrine brings rich and glorious blessings.

Furthermore, our faithful study of God's Word enables us to see the times in which we live and the things of this world in the light of God's Word. The more at home we are in God's Word, the more we will be attuned to tell right from wrong. "For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil," (Heb. 5:13-14). Pastors would doubtless be included in the class of those who are "of full age." The pastor has a great advantage over those Christians who have only a minimal knowledge of Scripture teachings. Weak Christians stand in great danger of being easily misled to false teaching or ungodly life. Christians who are weak in knowledge may not easily see through the ways of the world. In ignorance, they may join a lodge, or indiscriminately frequent the theater, or participate in sinful dance. As pastors, our study of God's Word enables us to see through these sinful pastimes of the unbelieving world, and recognize that they are not neutral in regard to our Christianity, but evil and false. What a blessing to be able to walk with sure and steady steps in this area! We learn to

know the many enemies of our souls and the many dangers which threaten our salvation. And thereby we are better able to strengthen and encourage those who are weak in knowledge and inexperienced at putting saving faith into practice.

As pastors, we not only enjoy blessings gained from our study of God's Word, but also in carrying out our pastoral duties. Paul writes: "In doing this thou shalt save thyself," (I Tim. 4:16). Obviously, Paul does not mean that we can be our own savior and redeemer, and that we no longer need Jesus. For us, too, Scripture says: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," (John 3:36) and this is obtained "by grace alone." The more richly that we, in our sermons, draw from the well-springs of Scripture, the more we ourselves will grow in Christian knowledge. When we in Confirmation instruction describe the sinful corruption of the human heart, we must include our own natural heart in this description. And when we describe the wonderful Person and work and office of the Savior, and seek to strengthen our catechumens' faith in Him, must this not serve to refresh our own hearts and strengthen our trust in Him? When we exhort people to sanctification and to all manner of good works, we ourselves are being exhorted at the same time. When we administer Baptism, we think back to our own Baptism and what it means for us. When we distribute the Lord's Supper, we are reminded time and again that our Savior wants us to be assured of the individual forgiveness of all our sins. When we speak the Benediction, we know that the blessing of the Triune God applies also to us.

Not only the public duties of our office, but also those which we carry out in private, serve as a blessing for us. When we must admonish someone in private for some particular sin (such as despising the Word and Sacrament, drunkenness, worldliness, an unforgiving attitude, etc), or when we encourage to some good work or virtue, or offer comfort in time of misfortune, tribulation, or cross-bearing, then we ourselves experience something which must surely serve as a blessing for our own personal Christianity. Time and again we see how firm a grip sin can take on the human heart, with all of

its resultant consequences. We cannot hold ourselves up in pharisaical pride, and say: "I am much better than that person!" No, in thankfulness we know what God's grace has done in us. In and of ourselves we are not one whit better than the most hardened sinner. Or when the Word of God that we bring to the individual is received in humility and joy, in repentance and faith, then how we must thank God for permitting us to see the power of His Word in the human heart! For us, these are times of joy, wherein we, too, are strengthened in the faith. How wonderful that God uses us poor instruments to bring joy and comfort to troubled hearts! At times in our ministry we are blessed with members who are rich in their knowledge of God's Word, and who are well experienced in the school of the cross. Very often we can learn more from them than they from us. In this way we receive a great blessing for our Christianity.

And let us not forget the many blessings which we receive from our ministering to the sick and the dying. As difficult as this part of our work can be, it can be a great blessing for our spiritual life. When working with the sick and dying, we often see the power of God's Word most clearly: the Law in bringing about contrition, and the Gospel in bringing joyful faith. In sickness and in death, we often see the power of the Christian faith in conquering the world and death. We often see the glorious fruits of faith, when those who are afflicted with painful illnesses become blessed with great patience and submission to God's will. They learn joy in suffering, and have a yearning desire to be with Christ. Many a time the sick and dying have made beautiful confessions of their faith before departing this life. How strengthening this must be for our faith! The Lord uses also this means to bless us in our pastoral office.

Also the cross which comes with our office brings a blessing. What does this cross consist in? It does not consist in the work and weariness that comes with the ministry. The hours of study, the tension of preaching, the various meetings, the teaching of classes, the care of souls — all of these things may well be a strain on his physical and mental powers. The delivery of many sermons during a short period of time, especially during

festival times and at funerals, is tiring for his body. He must call on the sick at any time of the day or night. There are the fallen, the stubborn, the erring, to deal with. Perhaps there is more than one congregation to care for. Perhaps after devoting much time to preparation of a sermon, only a small number are present to hear it. Perhaps some worldly spirit or false spirit has taken hold on some member in the congregation. These are some of the things that are involved in the work of the ministry. But none of this can properly be called a "cross" which goes with the office. Rather, this would refer to the suffering which we must take upon us because we carry on the holy ministry of the Word. The cross is what we suffer for Jesus' sake, as we take up that cross and follow Him.

Indeed, the confession of every Christian brings with it a cross and tribulation and persecution. How much more should not we who occupy the public ministry of the Word be willing to suffer for the Word! This Word which we preach has many enemies, with the result that we ourselves will have many enemies because of the Word. These enemies prepare much suffering for us. When Christ called Paul into the holy ministry, the Lord said to Ananias: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake," (Acts 9:16). Jeremiah confesses that it was the Word of God which aroused such hostility against him: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the Word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily," (Jer. 20:7-8).

The first enemy we have because we confess and proclaim the Word of God is Satan. Jesus told Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat," (Luke 22:31). All preachers of the Gospel, more or less, experience this sifting in the sieve of tribulation, as God permits Satan to do this. He wants to cause us all kinds of trouble, bodily and spiritual, inward and outward, in order to make us weary in our office.

Satan has a strong ally in the world. Jesus told His disciples: "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service," (John 16:2). The apostles experienced this hatred of the world. How heart-rending is not the lamentation of the Apostle Paul as he considers the hatred he and his fellow-apostles had experienced from the world in opposition to the Word which he proclaimed, (I Cor. 4:9-13).

The world that opposes the Word which we proclaim may be categorized as follows: 1) The unbelieving world hates the pure Gospel and those who proclaim it. Typical in this category would be the lodges and their adherents. 2) Also the heterodox world, in the sects and false Lutherans, hates us. They are often our greatest enemies. Because we remain faithful to God's Word, the heterodox charge us with being loveless, saying that we are stubborn and dogmatic. And that hurts! 3) Finally, we still have a sizable part of the world in our own congregations. There are false brethren, hypocritical Christians, who readily slander us and willingly seek to do us harm. They sow the seed of discontent in the congregation, and then say to us: "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" (I Kings 18:17). They try to make our work as difficult as possible, and to embitter it.

In addition to the devil and the world, our own sinful flesh also comes. It shuns the cross and refuses to suffer anything for the Word. Our flesh leads us to say: "If only I were not a preacher!" Very often the members of the congregation and even of his own family do not realize how his heart is aching. Among Christians it is generally the case that the believing preachers are the greatest cross-bearers.

In every such cross there is a blessing. Every Christian, and every pastor experiences this. It is God Who lays the cross on us. He can turn aside all such testings. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His will. He knows the very number of hairs on our head. He holds all things in His hand. He could turn aside all the raging of Satan and of the world against the Word which we preach. But that would not be good for us. And so He permits these bitter experiences to come, and then

causes them to turn out for a blessing upon us. "We know that all things (including every cross) work together for good to them that love God," (Rom. 8:28). When evil befalls us, then, we know that it is wholesome, though bitter, medicine which our heavenly Physician is giving us. He prunes the vine so that it may bring forth more fruit. "For He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," (Lam. 3:33). We pastors will not be without a cross or tribulation for long. Pastors stand in even greater spiritual danger than their hearers: of pride, of becoming self-righteous, etc. So the cross soon humbles us and keeps us with Christ.

So there are good reasons why preachers often suffer even greater afflictions and troubles than other Christians. Since God wants truly obedient children, He must apply the rod. If we are to learn to trust in Him, then any other possible support must be removed. If we are truly to rejoice, then we must first weep. Indeed, the cross is as needful for us as our daily bread.

And not only in this life do we reap rich blessings from our cross. It will be a blessing for us also in eternity. For "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him," (II Tim. 2:12).

So, let us faithfully pursue our God-given tasks. Let us use the Word of God for our own edification. Let us diligently use the Lord's Supper for the strengthening of our faith, that our own spiritual life may be properly cared for. Let us pray that He may ever continue to "bless us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," (Eph. 1:3). May He make of us vessels that are truly emptied of all that has no lasting value, in order that He may fill us with the fulness of His blessings. May He come to us sinners who are in such great need of consolation, and refresh us with His divine comfort. In this way it will come about that we shall both save ourselves and them that hear us, (I Tim. 4:16). May God grant it, for Jesus' sake!

A. Schulz

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS*

TEXT: I Kings 3:5-15

In Christ Jesus, Who alone can outfit us for a full and beneficial life, fellow redeemed, especially the graduates:

Children's literature is filled with stories of people who were granted a wish. Whether it be by a genie or a magic fish or a fairy godmother, they all were given a certain number of wishes. Sometimes it worked out so that they lived "happily ever after," but oftentimes it did not.

What an opportunity, though! To have anything you might wish for! This must be especially true for you graduates. You are at a major turning point in your lives. What if you could have anything you want! It might make a great difference in the direction that your life would take. Just what would you wish for?

We know that the stories in children's literature are pure fiction. However, our Scripture text is no fiction. Here we have the story of a real man, who was granted his greatest desire. God is the benefactor who came to him and said: "Ask what I shall give thee." ("I will grant you one wish. What do you want?")

What if God were to make the same offer to you on this day of your graduation? In a sense, He is making the same offer to you. To you Jesus speaks these words: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do ..." (John 14:13). So, what's your answer? You've been granted a wish. What shall it be? Money, good health, friends, power, prestige, honor, a long life, freedom from enemies, or what?

Solomon's request shows us the path that we should

* Delivered at Immanuel Lutheran College on May 26, 1978, by John K. Pfeiffer, pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church, Hales Corners, Wisconsin.

take. From him may you learn to make

A GRADUATION WISH

Solomon could have had anything he wanted. God attached no strings to His offer. Our minds would be swimming with the endless possibilities open before us. Some of us would become almost drunk on the very thought: "Anything I want! Wow!" However, Solomon's head was clear from the very outset. His first thought is one of thankful reflection. "Thou hast shown unto thy servant David, my father, great mercy." Solomon was now sitting upon the throne of his father. This very fact he traces back to the mercy of God. His father was a man of great virtue, but he was also a man of great sin. Without the mercy of God, David would have been lost. Without mercy, Solomon would not have been king. "Thou hast kept for him (David) this kindness, that Thou hast given him a son to sit upon his throne."

What about your past? If God is going to grant you a wish for the future, then let your first thought go to the past. Your fathers lived through a time of turmoil within the Lutheran church. What was it that brought them safely through? Surely not their great virtue and godliness. It was the mercy of God. Likewise, it was that mercy which moved them to build a school of Christian learning. It was that mercy which moved them to desire a Christian education for you. It was that mercy which enabled them to send you here.

There is only one thing that your fathers could not give you, and that is your faith in Jesus Christ. That is the work of God alone. Through the Gospel in Baptism and in the spoken Word, you have received your faith. This is the mercy of God toward you. Thus, your heart is assured of the forgiveness of your sins, of the righteousness of Christ which has been counted to your credit, of the everlasting salvation awaiting you. Look back, then, and say: "By the mercy of God and the kindness that He has shown toward our fathers, we are here today as graduates of ILC." With this in your mind, you are on the right track toward making the proper request of God.

Follow Solomon's thoughts again. "I am but a little child: I know not how to come out or go in." How old was Solomon? 5 or 6 years? No, he was about 21. It makes you think, doesn't it? Here you thought that you were now men and women, fully educated, ready to take a responsible place in the world, ready to make your own decisions. It should sober you up to hear this 21-year-old king declare that he was yet a child. "Humility" is the word. Solomon trembled at the lack of wisdom and understanding that he had. None of us should think of himself more highly than he ought. You are children facing the world. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time," (I Pet. 5:6). You are children before God, so totally dependent upon Him and His help.

If you approach your future with the idea that you will be able to face every storm, then I fear for you. You have stored away much learning. However, there is much more to be had, particularly in the practical areas of life. You have taken many written examinations, but the tests that really count are those in your day-to-day life. Tremble, then, as did Solomon, at the thought of your own inabilities. Only then will you learn the most important lesson of leaning upon God for help.

Again we hear Solomon: "Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered or counted for the multitude." You have considered the past mercies of God. You have pondered the present weaknesses of yourself. Now look around, and see where you are.

Solomon's words ring with thoughts of the Holy Christian Church: a chosen people, a great people, a numberless multitude. He knew where he was, and the importance of it weighed upon him. He was to be king over God's people, over that very nation from which the Savior would be born. He knew that, because of this, he needed a very special help. His ruling would be of spiritual significance. What he did would have spiritual effects. He was not a mere secular king, but a religious king.

I am sure that these words of Solomon must strike those of you who are going into the preaching and teaching ministry. You will surely be in the midst of God's chosen people. However, these words also apply to every one of you. It is a great mistake to imagine that there is any portion of your life which is segregated from God's chosen people. It makes no difference what your occupation will be. Be you a husband or wife, a father or mother, a mechanic or soldier, a laborer or professional person. It matters not. You are always in the midst of God's chosen people.

Therefore, what you do, how you handle your particular calling will have spiritual implications. What else can it mean, when it says: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God," (I Cor. 10:31-32). Yes, even your activities at the dinner table are important. Every moment of every day must be spent in the knowledge that you are in the midst of God's chosen people, and your actions will have their spiritual effects.

It's almost overwhelming! How can we weak people, we children, possibly handle the assignment of life? God grants to you a graduation wish. I hope that thoughts of money, power, prestige, and the like have completely left your thinking. Solomon said: "Give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this Thy so great a people?" He was going to be king, so his prayer was aimed at the understanding that he needed to carry out his calling.

Your callings will vary. Yet, you need the same understanding. You, too, need the special ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, wise and foolish, wholesome and injurious, true and false. Every day of your lives you will have to make such decisions. Such understanding does not come naturally. It can be gained only from God. The unbeliever is hopelessly lost in ignorance. He cannot begin to distinguish properly between good and bad. Most of all, he cannot choose the good. But you are not lost. You have learned to

know the God of love. You have seen that love in the sending of Jesus Christ to be your Savior. You have experienced that love by the Holy Spirit, Who entered your hearts to give you faith. This is the foundation of wisdom and understanding: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding," (Prov. 9:10).

This is the beginning, but there is much more wisdom and understanding to be had. No greater graduation wish could be made, than the request for wisdom and understanding. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him," (James 1:5). And your assurance that God will grant you wisdom and understanding lies in this: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

There is one more thing to learn about this God in Whom we believe. He is full of blessings. As with Solomon, so with you: He will shower you with the things you did not request. To those who honestly and trustingly seek the best things, God gives an abundance of good things.

Graduates, God desires to grant you a wish. What will it be? Nothing better could be wished for than godly understanding. Therefore, make that your graduation wish. Begin with the realization that you, like your fathers, are totally dependent on the mercy of God. Remember also who you are, children in a world which has greatly matured in the ways of evil, yet children in the hands of the Heavenly Father. Then, look around and see that you are in the midst of God's chosen people. All that you do and say will have its effect on them. Certainly, you need wisdom and understanding. Every person present today needs it. It begins with the fear of God, the knowledge of Jesus, and the faith from the Holy Spirit. Make your wish, then, and the God of mercy will grant it. It will be of untold benefit to you and to your fellow Christians.

John K. Pfeiffer



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