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The Third Use of the Law

(conclusion)

Paul F. Nolting

Insert: "The Law Accuses."

In the foregoing presentation the fact that the law always accuses was demonstrated. However, the question has arisen as to whether the law only accuses, that is, whether its exclusive function is to accuse. Both Scripture and the Confessions say "Yes" to the always, but "No" to the only.

When Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:9-10) that the law is for the lawless and disobedient, he was teaching the curbing effect of the law upon the lawless and the Christian, inasmuch as he is flesh. When the law cries "Halt" to anyone who insists on doing the forbidden or leaving the commanded undone, it curbs the coarse outbursts of sin and simultaneously accuses the doer or the one who leaves undone. When the law (Rom. 3:20 and 7:7) brings the sinner to the personal knowledge that he has sinned, it functions as a mirror, but again simultaneously accuses the sinner. When the law serves as a guide or a map to the Christian because of his flesh (Ps. 119:9), it again simultaneously accuses him, for if there were no deviation from the law in the new life of the Christian, there would be no need whatever for a guide or a rule. So it is that when the law functions as curb, mirror, and rule, it always accuses and condemns. To say that the law only accuses would be to deny the functions evident in the passages cited.

In *The Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Article II "Of the Law," Luther spelled out the curb and mirror uses of the law, as follows:

Here we hold that the Law was given by God, first, to restrain sin by threats and the dread of punishment, and by the promise and offer of grace and benefit. But all this miscarried on account of the wickedness which sin has wrought in man. For thereby a part were rendered worse, those, namely, who are hostile to the Law, because it forbids what they like to do, and enjoins what they do not like to do. Therefore, wherever they can escape punishment, they do more against the Law than before. These, then, are the rude and wicked men, who do evil wherever they have the opportunity.

The rest become blind and arrogant, and conceive the opinion that they observe and can observe the Law by their own powers, as has been said above concerning the scholastic theologians; thence come the hypocrites and false saints.

But the chief office or force of the Law is that it reveal original sin with all its fruits, and show man how very low his nature has fallen, and has become utterly corrupted; as the Law must tell man that he has no God nor regards God, and worships other gods, a matter which before and without the Law he would not have believed. In this way he becomes terrified, is humbled, desponds, despairs, and anxiously desires aid, but sees no escape; he begins to be an enemy of God, and to murmur, etc. This is what Paul says, Rom. 4,15: *The Law worketh wrath.* And Rom. 5,20: *Sin is increased by the Law.*

After the death of Luther a controversy developed over the so-called "third use of the law." The Epitome defines the three uses of the law as follows:

Since the Law was given to men for three reasons: first, that thereby outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient men; secondly, that men thereby may be led to the knowledge of their sins; thirdly, that after they are regenerate and the flesh notwithstanding cleaves to them, they might on this account have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life, a dissension has occurred between some theologians concerning the third use of the Law, namely, whether it is to be urged or not upon regenerate Christians. The one side has said, Yea; the other, Nay (Triglotta, 805).

When you combine the three uses of the law—as taught in the passages cited and as confessed in Article VI of the Formula of Concord—with Melancthon’s “The Law always accuses” in the Apology, Article IV, as Scripture consistently teaches, you arrive at the truth that the law always, but not only accuses.

Insert: “Sanctification.”

Sanctification, that is, the work of making the unholy holy, the unrighteous righteous, the ungodly godly, the sin-prone sin-free, the dying living, is from beginning to end the work of God, in no way the work of man. Man is the object of the sanctifying work of God; there is no such thing as self-sanctification. Scripture knows of no do-it-yourself sanctification.

God began the work of sanctifying us when He chose or elected us unto salvation, for our sanctification was and is the divinely ordained way by which the decree of election is carried out here in time. The holy apostles trace the origin of our sanctification back to eternity:

We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (2 Thess. 2:13).

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:2).

“Sanctification” is used in these passages in the wide sense, including everything that the Spirit of God does from snatching us from the power of sin to remaking us sin-free in the world to come. This would include what we commonly call conversion, justification, renewal, sanctification in the narrow sense, that is, the doing of good works, preservation in the faith, the granting of a blessed end, the resurrection of the body, and the bestowal of glory everlasting. All of this was given unto us already in eternity in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, for we were elected or chosen unto salvation “through sanctification of the Spirit.”

God puts His eternal decree of election into effect in the case of each individual the moment that person is called to faith by the gospel through the power of the Spirit. The working of faith, which is basic for and the basis of all sanctification, is entirely the work of God. “Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures” (Jas. 1:18). In the intra-trinitarian economy it is the Holy Spirit who has been given the responsibility for sanctification. So Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 12:3).

The moment faith is kindled the person is justified, for “a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). In that same moment he is renewed. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). His renewal manifests itself in a daily putting “off . . . the old man” and putting “on the new man” (Eph. 4:24). That, in turn, manifests itself in the doing of good works, “for we are his workmanship, created In Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Sanctification in the wide sense includes the total activity of the Spirit of God for and in man, but sanctification in the narrow sense, that is, renewal which manifests itself in the doing of good works, is the work of the Spirit in man. When the Spirit justifies a person, He creates faith in Jesus Christ in the heart of that person and thereby gives him the righteousness of Christ. That righteousness, which is foreign, alien, and outside of man, is imputed or credited or accounted to man. Even as the sin of Adam is imputed to man, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to man and received individually by the faith that the Spirit of God works. But sanctification in the narrow sense is the work of the Spirit within man. It consists in this that the Spirit creates something new in man, faith, “the inward man.” That something is not an equal or an associate but rather an agent of the Spirit of God. St. Paul calls believers “laborers together with God”

(1 Cor. 3:9) and “workers together with him” (2 Cor. 6:1), but these terms are not to be understood as a team of horses of equal strength pulling a load, but of One supplying the spiritual power and graciously using the other as His agent, for it is always “God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

God works in the Christian both the willing and the doing of His good pleasure. What is the norm for His good pleasure? It is simply the law of God. Our Lord warned against “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). But it is not the law, as given in its entirety to Moses, that is the norm because the ceremonial features of the law have been specifically disavowed in the New Testament (Col. 2:16-17) and the political laws fell with the dissolution of the Jewish State. What remains is what is called the moral law, which is simply the basic moral will of God, which demands love Godward and manward. If the Christian were entirely and perfectly renewed in this life, he would have no need of an external norm for doing good works, for the law is inscribed in his heart by the power of the gospel. Because his flesh constantly is active sabotaging the new man, the law is necessary as a norm lest the Christian become guilty of self-chosen works or “will worship” (Col. 2:23). Luther’s “Treatise on Good Works” (*Luther’s Works*, 44:21-114) is an excellent example of using the law in this way.

The law prescribes, but is unable to implement or produce. It remains forever true of all Christians that to will is present, but how to perform is lacking (Rom. 7:18). The spiritual energy to do anything good in the sight of God must come from without the Christian, from the God of all grace. The source of this spiritual energy is the God of all grace, who elected us unto sanctification. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that “this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3), he was referring to the gracious, good will of God that chose them already in eternity unto salvation through sanctification. The Spirit of God puts that will of God into effect when He calls persons out of the darkness of sin and guilt into the light of forgiveness. In that instant the person is renewed, becomes a new person, receives the law written in his heart, receives the gift of the new man whose every thought, emotion and expression of will corresponds perfectly with the immutable, ethical will of God that demands love Godward and manward. Once the Spirit has created the new man, He does not abandon him, but supplies continuing energy so that the Christian continues to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

Scripture is full of them. Their content is the law; their implementation comes from the gospel. They are directed to the Christian, who needs such commands because of his flesh, but who can respond only because of the new man who is created and sustained by the gospel. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33) is such a command from our Lord urging life according to the first table of the law. “Be ye kind to one another” (Eph. 4:32) is such a command of Paul, urging the second table of the law upon the Ephesians. In such commands the exhortation is to live in love Godward and manward, which is impossible for natural man, but possible for the gospel-created man.

Whatever good the Christian does is the product of the gospel working in him by the power of the Holy Spirit. His flesh, without fail, puts its imprint on all the good works of a Christian. So it is that the Christian also sins in the performance of good works. How then can such works be called good? They are good only because they are covered with the shield of Christ’s righteousness. We make an offering unto the Lord, but thoughts of reluctance, censure of others, self-satisfaction accompany our offerings. The blood of Christ must wash those stains away; the righteousness of Christ must cover that unrighteousness. We need to pray, “And forgive us our trespasses” also when we do our good works.

We become Christians when by faith we receive the imputed righteousness of Christ. In that moment we are renewed. We begin to live a life of new obedience, doing works of righteousness, but never perfectly. Daily the righteousness of Christ, which is ours by faith,

covers our unrighteousness and impels us to live in righteousness. In this way we are daily sanctified.

SPECIAL FACETS

I. Terminology: Will of God, Law, and Commandment.

Paul's most extensive and intensive discussions of the law are to be found in his letters to the Galatians and Romans. In both epistles he most decisively places the law in antithesis to the gospel. The law is negative, unable to produce righteousness or sanctification or life, but ever accusing and condemning and so provoking the wrath of God and bringing death to the sinner. But in each epistle, after having exposed the law as the death of the sinner, Paul continues by using language from the law in his exhortations to the righteousness of life. He urges the Galatians that they should "by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Gal. 5:13-14). So also in Romans, after he had systematically and conclusively disavowed the law as instrumental either for righteousness or the new life, he urges: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." Then follows a citing of the commandments of the second table of the law with the summary of loving the neighbor as one's self, and a repeating of the fact that "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10).

We might well ask, "What's going on here?" Is Paul contradicting himself? How can he so emphatically disavow the law in the area of producing a righteousness that will stand before God and in creating the righteousness of life and then turn right around and quote from the law in urging the life of new obedience?

We observe that in using the term law in the hortative sections of his epistles St. Paul uses the content of the law, which is always love Godward and manward, and the form of the law, which is the imperative, but without the distinctive characteristics of demand, threat, and condemnation that characterize the law in its antithesis to the gospel and that are inherent in it as given by Moses, and—be it noted—that are never completely absent. What accounts for this change? When the protective shield of the righteousness of Christ is cast over the believer, he is shielded from the accusing force of the law. He has been redeemed from the curse of the law. The Spirit of God indicates that fact by the terms He caused the holy writers to use.

We observe the amazing use of the term, "the law of Christ," shortly after Paul has said, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:3). Then in Galatians 6:2 Paul exhorts, "Bear ye one anothers burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Lovingly restoring someone who has been overtaken in a fault is fulfilling the law of Christ. Is Paul utterly contradicting himself by making Christ a new Lawgiver? God forbid! But the question persists: What is the relationship between the "law of Moses" and the "law of Christ?" In the ninth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians Paul was speaking of his love for all men and his adapting himself to their conditions in the free use of his liberty that he might gain some. He wrote, "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without the law, as without the law." He then inserts a parenthetical statement: "being not without law to God (νόμος θεοῦ [M: νόμος θεῶ]), but under the law to Christ (έννομος Χριστοῦ [M: έννομος Χριστῶ])." What is the difference between "the law" or the "law of Moses" and the "law of Christ?" The content (love) and the form (imperative) are the same, but the spirit is entirely different. For the former appears in an adversary relationship to the sinner, as the imposition of a foreign, hostile will upon a rebellious subject, the latter as a harmonious relationship—the law of Christ finding its reflection in the soul life of the sinner—become-saint in whose heart the law of God has been written by the Spirit of God.

Three times Paul uses the expression, ‘law of God’ in his epistle to the Romans. The phrase appears twice in the seventh chapter, where the duality of the Christian is bared. After confessing the conflict and contrast between his will and his performance, Paul makes the statement, ‘For I delight in the law of God after the inward man’ (Rom. 7:22). In his final summary statement Paul says, ‘I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin’ (Rom. 7:25). In both instances the substitution of ‘the law,’ which always means the law of Moses, for the law of God would have created an emotional dissonance, for after having exposed the law as accusing and condemning mankind, working God’s wrath upon the sinner, exposing the true nature of sin as rebellion, and so effecting the death of the sinner, it would have come as a jar to delight in and serve that same law. Continuing in chapter eight Paul underscores the antithesis between the Spirit and the law. The Spirit succeeds where the law fails. But this success does not change the fact that flesh remains flesh ever, at enmity against God and ‘not subject to the law of God’ (Rom. 8:7). It would appear that with the term ‘law of God’ Paul is pointing to the eternal content of the immutable will of God in contrast to its revelation in the law that functions, because of sin, as the accuser and condemner and so executioner of the sinner. Again, the protective shield of the righteousness of Christ tempers the terms used by Paul.

When the apostles speak of the new life of obedience in the regenerate, they use terms other than the law, namely ‘the will of God,’ ‘sanctification,’ and ‘the commandment.’ We have observed the change in Paul’s terminology in both Galatians and Romans. When Paul urges sanctified living upon the Romans, he sums up the whole of that life as ‘proving what is the will of God’ (Rom. 12:2). In Colossians Paul assures his readers that he has been praying ‘that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding’ (Col. 1:9). There is no mention of the law in either of the letters to the Thessalonians. When Paul urges Christian living, he urges putting into action the gracious will of God, ‘for this is the will of God, even your sanctification’ (1 Thess. 4:3). Sanctification is living in the holiness of love Godward and manward. Amidst the individual exhortations in chapter five Paul refers to the will of God that reflects His nature of love: ‘In every thing giving thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you’ (1 Thess. 5:18). There is no reference to the law in 2 Corinthians. In Ephesians the law appears once as ‘the law of commandments in ordinances’ (Eph. 2:15), which has been abolished.

In First Peter the term ‘law’ is completely lacking, Peter repeatedly referring to the ‘will of God,’ for example: ‘For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men’ (1 Pet. 2:15), and Christ suffered that he, the one for whom Christ suffered, ‘no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God’ (1 Pet. 4:2).

The book of James has two unusual phrases, ‘the royal law’ (Jas. 2:8) and ‘the perfect law of liberty’ (Jas. 1:25). The former describes the law of love as coming from the King whose king-subjects have received power to live royally in love. They have been saved by their King to live as kings under their King and to serve Him in works of love. The latter is a play on words, a paradox, that reminds the believer that he is now at liberty to do freely what he was once under bondage to do.

First Corinthians contains an enlightening passage (7:19): ‘Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.’ The new life of the Spirit is described as ‘keeping the commandments of God,’ that is, living a life of love Godward and manward. Again there is an equality in content and form with the law, yet a complete dissimilarity in spirit.

The book of Hebrews uses the term ‘law’ only in reference to the Old Testament law, which achieved its goal or τέλος in Christ. Christians are to do the will of God (Heb. 10:36 and 13:21). ‘Now the God of peace . . . Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working

in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ" (Heb. 13:20-21). The term "law" occurs in the quotation of the Jeremiah 31:33 passage: "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb. 8:10), the fulfillment of which finds its echo in the phrase "under (or in) the law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21), and in the twice used phrase "law of God" in Romans seven.

St. John consistently uses the term "law" to signify the "law of Moses." The will of God or Christ for the new life of faith is invariably expressed by "commandment," not by "law." Especially significant is the use of the term "commandment" in the words of our Lord spoken in the night of his betrayal (John 14-16). In the book of Revelation the term "law" does not appear at all, Christians are described as "those who keep the commandments of God" (Rev. 12:17 and 14:12). Again we observe that the protective shield of the righteousness of Christ covering the believer moves the Spirit of God to use terminology befitting his redemption from the curse of the law.

Scripture uses terms in what we call a proper and improper or narrow and broad sense. For example, "repentance" at times means contrition alone and at times contrition and faith; "sanctification" has its broad and narrow sense; "church" is used in its proper sense as the Congregation of Saints and its improper sense as the visible congregation of confessors gathered about the Word and sacraments. So also "Torah" is used to convey not only the legal precepts but also the gospel promises. So also we find that the term "law" is used in Scripture and in the language of the church, when referring to commands, precepts, laws, in both a broad and a narrow sense, or what may be called a proper and improper sense.

In the economy of God the term "law" did not appear until Moses. In the beginning there was no law, for there was no need of law since Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. But the immutable will of God, which reflects His essential nature, that is, love, was there. It found expression in the creation of man according to the image of God. After the fall God did not reveal or convey His moral will to man in verbal form until Sinai. At that time the eternal immutable moral will of God took a definite form in "The Law," "The Torah," the "Law of Moses." That form endured until Christ. After Christ we find the content and form of the law enduring in expressions like "commandment" and "will of God." This part of the law has been called the moral law, that is, the Decalog, understanding that the matter of images, the Sabbath, and other elements were forms that passed away. Summing up this historical evolution we find that the eternal immutable moral will of God antecedes the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai, forms the basic content of that law and so parallels the period from Moses to Christ, and continues on thereafter as the command to love God and neighbor into eternity where love will reign supreme and unchallenged and where there will no longer be a curse.

It was St. Paul who was chosen by the Spirit of God especially to set in sharp antithesis the law as the unrelenting accuser and condemner of man and the gospel as the bestower of justification and sanctification and so life to man. The antithesis was brought out most sharply by Paul in his brief statement, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6). However, the same Paul makes use of the content (love Godward and manward) and the form (the imperative) in urging and teaching the new life for believers. Thus Paul distinguishes between the temporary and the abiding in the law. He distinguished between the form that the eternal immutable moral will of God took in the period from Moses to Christ and the form which that same will continues to take until the end of time. The accusing and condemning, and hence killing function of the law, which is essential to the concept of law when placed in antithesis to the gospel, always and without exception stops when and where Christ comes. The protective shield of the righteousness of Christ wards off the accusing force of the law from the Christian, insofar as he is new man. Insofar as the Christian is flesh the full force of the accusing law is felt. As far as the new life of obedience of the Christian is concerned, the content of the law (love) and the form (the imperative) continue on, the former because neither the nature of the unchanging

God nor His moral will for man can change and the latter because of the dual nature of the believer.

Down through the ages the church has wrestled with the terminology of this basic distinction. Thomas Aquinas introduced the threefold division of the Mosaic law as civic, ceremonial and moral. That division has become part of the language of the church but has wrought confusion in understanding the antithesis between law and gospel and has converted Christ into a new lawgiver. Distinguishing the moral law from the rest of the Mosaic code, as the abiding will of the unchanging God, suffers because the command to love is intertwined in the Decalog with elements that apply exclusively to the Jews. What must be kept in mind is that the law of Moses, all of it, came to an end with Christ, but the eternal immutable will of God, as revealed and expressed in the law of Moses, continues on. Thus the terminology could be law and will of God, or law in its proper sense as always accusing, condemning and so killing and law in its wider sense as the verbalization of the eternal immutable moral will to love God and man.

We should be aware of the fact that this distinction is made by our Confessions. In the *Apology*, "Article IV: Of Justification," Melancthon speaks of the law in its proper sense, repeatedly using the expression, *Lex semper accusat* (Triglotta, 130, 156). When the *Formula of Concord*, "Article VI: Of the Third Use of the Law" distinguishes between works of the Law and those of the Spirit, it carefully indicates that it is using law in its wider sense:

But in order that, as far as possible, all misunderstanding may be prevented, and the distinction between the works of the Law and those of the Spirit be properly taught and preserved, it is to be noted with especial diligence that when we speak of good works which are in accordance with God's Law (for otherwise they are not good works), then the word Law has only one sense, namely, the immutable will of God, according to which men are to conduct themselves in their lives (Triglotta, 967).

However, we dare not imagine that this distinction is consistently used. Of greater importance is it to realize the relationship of the individual to the law and the relationship of the law to the flesh and new man of the Christian. Paragraph 6 of "Article VI, Epitome" makes this point:

Thus the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent, both to regenerate and unregenerate men, one (and the same) Law, namely, the immutable will of God; and the difference, so far as concerns obedience, is alone in man, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does for the Law out of constraint and unwillingly what it requires of him (as also the regenerate do according to the flesh); but the believer, so far as he is regenerate, does without constraint and with a willing spirit that which no threatenings (however severe) of the Law could ever extort from him (Triglotta, 807).

II. Calvinism and the Third Use of the Law.

John Calvin developed a theological system with the sovereignty of God forming the keystone. The key attribute of God was not love, but omnipotence. Accordingly God predestinated some to everlasting life and some to eternal reprobation. Since God's power, whether it be sheer force to move mountains or the power of grace, is irresistible, grace is also irresistible. It is also immediate, since no means are necessary to convey God's irresistible call. The call is simply implementing the eternal decree. Since God's grace is irresistible, it follows also that no one can fall from grace, though he may appear to do so for a time. This is the doctrine of eternal security that is popularly called "once saved, always saved."

In the area of ethics the sovereignty of God becomes evident in the ethical imperative of the law. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1535) Calvin defended the position that the gospel and the law share in substantial unity with each other. In Calvin's view the Decalog is the

“one everlasting and unchangeable rule” for our Christian life, possessed with innate power to compel obedience. Instead of the law standing in the service of the gospel, the gospel is made to serve the law. Whereas Luther called the theological use of the law its principal and proper use, Calvin made the didactic use of the law “the principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law.” Luther emphatically contended that Christ is no new Moses, whereas Calvin makes Him just that.

What are the results of this imposition of the law upon the new man? Sabbatarianism is consistent Reformed teaching and practice, along with the blue laws. The first commandment’s prohibition against images remains in force. Tithing is the divinely ordained measure of giving, also for the New Testament, with members who comply receiving an asterisk of recognition behind their names in the church yearbook. Faith is converted from trust to obedience. Worship becomes the fulfillment of a duty rather than a means for being spiritually recharged by the gospel and responding with prayer and praises. The concept of the means of grace is unknown, yet baptism and the Lord’s Supper are observed as legally established New Testament rites. Prayer likewise is the discharge of a duty, rather than an exercise of faith in petition or thanksgiving. The “handbook of discipline” becomes the daily guide for living. The life of the individual Christian becomes burdened with endless rules and regulations regarding food, drink, dress, use of tobacco, entertainment, and so on and on and on. The result is frequently a double standard, outward conformity in public but violation in private.

When the law in its didactic use is thus imposed upon the new man of the Christian, it is inevitable that grace is destroyed and replaced by faith in Christ plus the prescribed good works. This becomes evident, especially in funeral sermons when the deceased is praised for having “accepted Christ as his or her Savior” and for having made his or her salvation sure by performing the works prescribed or approved by the church. This, of course, destroys Christ and introduces an element of subjective uncertainty in the mind and heart of the individual.

A further consequence of this converting the gospel into a new law is the blinding of the hearts to the dangers of (or a conditioning of hearts for) the many work-righteous, character-building organizations in society, whether it be the Scouts on the youth level or Masonry on the adult level. Reformed polemics against Masonry tend to emphasize the blasphemy of the initiation oaths and the secretiveness of the organization rather than the essential issue of work-righteousness, which destroys faith in Christ Jesus.

A theological consequence is viewing the kingdom of Christ as a spiritual totalitarian state run according to Christ’s commands. The fervently awaited Millennium is to be the Lord’s rule with the rod of iron, suppressing opposition until the final uprising before the end of all things.

A further consequence is the inability to perceive the papal system, which has pronounced its official anathema on the central doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ Jesus, as the Great Antichrist foretold in Scriptures. Instead untold effort is expended in examining prophecy in the light of current events to find clues to determine the identity of the expected international statesman, who will befriend the State of Israel and then turn upon them, thus revealing himself to be the Antichrist.

Any preaching, teaching, or counseling that makes or tends to make the law a burden or obligation of the Christian undermines the gospel and leads to work righteousness.

III. Question: Does the new man have complete knowledge of God’s Will?

In itself the question is academic since it presupposes an ideal situation that never occurs in the life of a Christian. The new man never functions without the constant opposition of the flesh. By virtue of love, which is simultaneously created in the heart of the Christian with faith,

the Christian possesses the potential answer to every moral problem, for love is always the fulfilling of the law and the reflection of the moral nature of God. However, indwelling sin prevents that potentiality from ever becoming a reality in the life of a Christian. For that reason the key word in sanctification is “growth.” The Spirit is given as the “earnest” (ἄρραβὼν) of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14). We have been anointed by God “who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor. 1:22). St. Paul speaks of Christians as having “the firstfruits of the Spirit” τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες (Rom. 8:23). “Believers are not renewed in this life perfectly or completely, *completive vel consummative* [as the ancients say]” *Formula of Concord*, Article VI, Thor. Decl. (Triglotta, 965).

The concept of “earnest” indicates a beginning but implies a continuance. The concept of “firstfruits” implies continued maturing until the full harvest has ripened. Scripture again and again emphasizes the growth concept in sanctification. St. Peter speaks of Christians as newborn babes who desire the pure milk of the Word “that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). He concludes his second epistle with the exhortation, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). St. Paul teaches that the ascended Lord of the Church supplies ministers of the Word to the end that “we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). In Paradise our first parents were to grow by using their ability not to sin by obeying. We are to grow in knowledge and understanding of the Word, in our struggle against the lusts of the flesh, in using the organs of our bodies to love more and more, ever putting off the old man and putting on the new. We await future growth, for “how I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12). Certainly every Christian has experienced such growth and looks forward to continued growth, for there is either growth or withering away and dying.

Such growth is achieved by the power of the gospel, which has freed the Christian from the demands, curses, and condemnation of the law. In so doing it has freed him to live in the law. For the law is not made void by faith, but is rather established by faith (Rom. 3:31). Freedom from the law does not mean despising the law, but living in it freely, willingly, spontaneously, eagerly. So it is that the Christian delights “in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). So it is that he is exhorted to be constantly, in every situation and relationship, proving or testing “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). So it has always been. The psalmist speaks of the blessedness of the man whose “delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Ps. 1:2). The law of the Lord contained both the promise of the Savior with all the rites of worship pointing towards the fulfillment, as well as the moral will of God. The psalmist speaks of the law of the Lord and His statutes as “more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Ps. 19:10). How could it be otherwise? The new man is the creation of the Spirit of God, who revealed the eternal immutable will of God that man should live in love toward God and his fellow man. He sees in every revealed and inspired verbalization of the will of God a reflection of the moral values that the Spirit has created within him, although the flesh prevents him from responding fully to these values.

We are to be warned against using the analogy of the Son of God in His humiliation here upon this earth. He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). His increasing was a gradually increasing awareness of who He was and what He had come to earth to do. This is the mystery of His person and His humiliation, a matter which we cannot explore but before which we must kneel in worshipful silence. He was true man, but without sin. We are conceived and born in sin and never get rid of our flesh until death. Any deduction from His experience to ours collapses on the factor of our indwelling sin.

IV. Question: Is there a difference between the “mirror” and the “rule” use of the law?

In considering this question we do well to remember that we easily become victims of our "Greek" taught minds, which divide and subdivide and then compartmentalize the Word of God. When we speak of the uses of the law, we are attempting to give names to functions of the law as we see it operative in the Scriptures. That is a pedagogic device, excellent for teaching but dangerous if it becomes a straitjacket by which we in our minds attempt to restrict and confine the Holy Spirit, cataloging passages that fit into the "mirror" pigeonhole and others that fit into the "rule" pigeonhole.

The law forbids and it demands. It says, "This is the wrong way; stop!" And then again: "This is the right way; go!" In so doing it always has the power and function of revealing transgressions when someone goes when he should stop, or stops when he should be going. But the matter does not end here. The next question to be considered is: To whom is the law speaking? Is it addressed to lawless or law-abiding? Is it speaking to those who know and feel no sin or to those who have been crushed by its demands. The lawless need the law, not the righteous. That is elementary, yet also not the answer in its entirety. For when we consider the righteous, the child of God, Mr. Christian, we know that he is righteous by imputation, not by way of life. He is *simul justus et peccator* and ever remains such. Because of his flesh he needs the law in all of its functions.

Error can arise when we think of the several uses of the law as unrelated, compartmentalized functions of the law. Now this to the exclusion of that. Now the other to the exclusion of the first. No, God has revealed His will in the law. No man can escape that law. How it strikes him depends upon his relationship to God. Whenever the will of God is revealed to the Christian, it cries out a "Halt!" to his flesh. It erects a barrier; this far and no farther, or else! At the same time the same directive of the will of God finds a ready and willing response from the new man. How could it be otherwise, for what God creates in us cannot be against His will! The new man finds in that revelation a divine standard by which to coerce and constrain the flesh to obedience. He uses it as a mother uses soap to wash the tongue of a boy who has used a dirty word, because this is not what God wants. He uses it as cattlemen use a loading shoot to guide steers into a truck. But simultaneously that same verbalization of the will of God reveals one's sin and leads to a deepening awareness of the sin within, because when my God tells me to be loving, kind, tenderhearted, humble, or whatever, I know I never measure up, for my heart convicts me.

So the several uses of the law are not independent of each other. Rather they work simultaneously in the Christian, saying "Stop!" and "This is the way you have to go!" to the flesh with the new man concurring one hundred percent, while at the same time causing grief over failures and so being driven to Christ for forgiveness of those failures and renewed strength, drawn from the cross and the empty tomb, to strive yet again.

V. Question: Is the Christian ever told to do things in order that he do them?

What God tells man He wants done, He wants done or else! The situation is this that man cannot do anything that God wants him to do except outwardly, that is, the performance of civic righteousness. So it is that when God issues moral commands to natural man, no results corresponding to those commands happen. God says, "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not," but man continues doing the forbidden and leaving the commanded undone. What was God to do? Continue repeating His commands and threats and then acting upon them? That would have meant the consignment of the human race to hell.

So God devised another way. He sent His Son to do and leave undone all that He commanded man to do and leave undone. Then on the basis of what His Son had done He gave

new commands and with those commands supplied the creative power necessary for man to comply to those commands. God commanded man to ‘repent and believe the gospel.’ Of himself man can only react with, ‘No, no, a thousand times no; I’d rather go to hell than say yes!’ But God wills that His command to repent and believe produce the desired effect, and so it is that sinners are brought to repentance and faith.

Then God continues to make His moral commands known to man, in whom He has restored His image. By virtue of God’s own creation in man, man now possesses a will to obey the command that is accompanied by the creative power of God. Does God want these commands obeyed? Certainly He does, for He supplies the creative power from without and from within man to see to it that His moral commands are obeyed.

But God does not overpower man and convert him into a moral robot, so God’s commands to love, to forgive, to be patient, trusting, humble, and so on are only partially fulfilled. But that doesn’t satisfy God. He wants perfection, and He achieves that by covering the Christian’s imperfect, flesh-marred obedience with the righteousness of His Son, so that the imperfect works of the Christian are accounted perfect for Christ’s sake.

So it is that some commands of God, because man has not the ability to respond, serve only to reveal man’s sin, while others are accompanied by the creative power of God and so effect a change in man according to the will of God.

If Our Heart Condemn Us

Arvid G. W. Gullerud

For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. 1 John 3:20

Are you sure that your sins are forgiven? Are you sure that you will finally go to heaven? Are you really sure? These are very important questions, for if a man is not sure of the forgiveness of sins, if he is not sure of his eternal salvation, then he must either run away from the realities of life or from the inevitable fears of death, only to find at the end of his life that he has made the greatest mistake a person can make in this world, and that he has lost his soul, or else he must live in tormenting doubt and uncomfortable insecurity that may finally lead him into complete hopelessness and despair.

We hear a great deal about security in our time, and the American people seem to think that if they are financially protected, they have real security, and they can have a life with real peace of mind. However, the only thing that a whole box full of insurance policies and a whole raft of government programs will protect is our bank account. A life insurance policy is not going to keep us from dying, and a hospital insurance policy is not going to keep us from getting sick.

We shall find real peace of mind and true peace of soul only when we have found a refuge in the precious blood of the crucified Christ, only when we have gained the assurance and certainty that through the blood of Christ our sins are forgiven and that by his grace we have the certain unfailing hope of everlasting life.

But if a person has that, then he or she has a solid ground on which to stand, then he has a mighty fortress from which he can conquer in all the battles of life. For if I know for sure that when I die I shall come into the glorious mansion of my Father’s house in heaven, then I can face every difficulty, then I can bear every loss and every evil and every pain and still say with the psalmist: *Why art thou cast down, o my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance* (Ps. 42:5). And it is just this security that we look for in our religion. And we shall find it if we learn well the lesson taught in our text in which God’s inspired apostle says: **If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.** May the Holy Spirit help us all as we study these words.

There is, of course, a false security in which people live. It is the security in which people do not see the sinfulness of their own lives and do not understand the meaning of the holiness and righteousness of God. Often we hear somebody say: "I am not afraid to die, because I have always tried to live a good life. I have always tried to be good." Such people, however, are not putting their trust in God, but in themselves, and to them the words of our text can offer no comfort. Their heart may not condemn them, but they ought to remember that God is greater than their heart and knows all things. Though they believe themselves to be righteous, yet God, who knows all their thoughts and all their desires, condemns them and all people, when he says in the Bible that all the world is guilty before God. *All have sinned and come short of the glory of God* (Rom. 3:23).

Strangest of all is this, that we sometimes find people who have gone to church all their lives, and who have heard the Word of God Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, and still they have not learned that in themselves they are lost and condemned sinners. At the death bed of a dying mother, after I had just assured the dying mother that she did not have to fear death and the judgment because the Lord Jesus had taken her sins away, I have heard a daughter say, "Pastor, that's what I always tell mother too. She doesn't have to be afraid because she has been a good mother and tried the best she could to be good."

Others, who live in false security, admit that they are not perfect. They confess that they are sinners and have done wrong at least a few times in their lives. But they imagine since God is love, he will not punish sinners, that he will simply look with kindly tolerance upon their weaknesses and faults. But while God is a God of love and of mercy and of kindness—and such love and kindness and mercy that the world will never fully understand it—yet he is also a God of holiness and of justice. He will by no means clear the guilty, as the Bible says, unless in some way the penalty of their guilt is paid to the very last penny.

These people who think that God will not punish sin really make a false god for themselves in their own minds, a god that does not exist, and they might just as well carve their god out of wood and stone. They ought to remember what happened to the Son of God when the sins of the world were laid on him, even though he prayed that the cup might pass from him. For such people the words of our text were not written. Men, women and children must learn to become unsure of themselves before they can become sure of God; they must learn to see their own insecurity without God before they can find security in God.

Our text speaks especially to people whose hearts condemn them, to people who know that they are sinners and who are afraid of becoming lost, to people whose hearts are sometimes filled with terror when they think of death and the last judgment.

We sometimes are inclined to think that when our hearts feel that way, that this is evidence that we have lost our faith and that there is no hope for us. Because of what we see in our hearts, we become unsure of our salvation and uncertain about the forgiveness of sins. Sometimes our heart condemns us under the prompting of the devil and tells us that perhaps Jesus died for us, but our sins are just too great to be forgiven.

But *God is greater than our heart and knows all things*. When God sent His son into the world to lay down his life for our sins, he knew then already exactly what our sins would be, and still he tells us in his inspired Word that the Lord Jesus took away the sins of the world. Do you realize then what our heart is trying to tell us when it says that we are so bad that we can never get to heaven? It is actually trying to tell us that our sin is greater than God's grace, that it is greater than God's love, that it is greater than the work of Christ, and that God did not know what he was talking about when he said that the blood of Christ cleanses us from ALL sin. To talk that way about your sins is not humility, but unbelief. God is greater than our heart and knows all things, and when our heart tells us one thing and God tells us another, we have no business listening to this heart of ours.

Sometimes we find people who have no doubts about this, who are sure that the Lord Jesus paid for all the sins of the world, and yet they are disturbed by their sins and unsure of their salvation because their heart condemns them and tells them that they are not sorry enough for their sin. They would like to feel more sorry, and they think that they must repent more deeply before they can be forgiven. But when we feel that we cannot be forgiven because we are not sorry enough, we show that we still have a tendency to trust in our own works to save us, and we still imagine that God will be merciful to us because of something we do.

But we ought to remember that God does not forgive us because we are sorry. He forgives us only because Jesus died for us. Sorrow over sin is not necessary to earn God's forgiveness. It could never do this, for *the wages of sin is death* and not tears. If you would cry a whole river of tears, this would not be enough to wash away one sin. The only thing that can do this is the blood of Christ. We sing, (TLH 376:2):

Could my zeal no respite know / Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; / Thou must save and Thou alone.

Sorrow over sin is necessary for one thing; to make us realize how much we need the Savior's forgiveness. If it has made us see that, it has done everything to us it is supposed to do. None of us is ever as sorry as we ought to be—someone has said that even the tears that we shed over our sins need to be washed—but we should let our sorrow drive us to trust *only* in the promises of God who is greater than our heart and knows all things.

We make a great mistake when we look for the certainty of salvation in our own heart in any way. Sometimes it actually happens that people who are convinced that the Lord Jesus is their Savior, who believe that the only way they can get to heaven is through the blood of Christ, look into their own hearts, and in their own eyes they are condemned and they say, "O how I wish that I could believe that the Lord Jesus is my Savior! But I just can't believe it."

What they really mean is that they find it difficult to believe that they are believers. Their heart tells them that they are not believers at all. But again, they are making the mistake of thinking that their salvation depends on something they do.

The Lord Jesus died for all men, whether they are believers or not. If a person does not believe, this does not change the truth of God in any way. St. Paul says, "*If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself*" (2 Tim. 2:13). And in another place he wrote: "*What if some do not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect? God forbid!*" (Rom. 3:3-4). Whether I believe it or not, the Lord Jesus died for me. God's Word is true. His promise will be kept. That is what God tells us, and God is greater than our heart and knows all things. I ought to remember, too, that God does not forgive me because I believe. He forgives me only because of what Jesus has done. Our heart may tell us that Jesus did not die for us, but God's Word tells us that he did. Now which of the two should we believe? Our heart, which knows so little, or God, who knows all things?

Closely related to this problem is the one that people have when they say that they cannot feel that their sins are forgiven, when they feel instead that they are damned. But again, whether we are forgiven or not does not depend on what our heart feels and does. It depends only on what God has promised and on what the Savior has done for us. Someone once asked Dr. Martin Luther, "Do you feel that your sins are forgiven?" He answered: "No, I do not feel that my sins are forgiven, but I know it just as sure as there is a God in heaven, for feelings come and feelings go, but the Word of God shall forever stand." When the devil tells us that we are lost, and our hearts believe the devil and condemn us, we should never forget that *God is greater than our hearts and knows all things*. If we know how sinful we are, our hearts will condemn us again and again, but we remember that Paul once wrote: "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yes rather, that is*

risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:33ff.).

When our hearts condemn us, there is always a higher court in which we can appeal. We carry our case from this little ‘justice-of-the-peace court’ to the Supreme Court of heaven, and there is the Judge who tells us that for Jesus sake, we are not guilty, that though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. He tells us that the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world; he tells us that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. If God Himself tells us that, what business do our hearts have to tell us something else?

Are you sure, then, that your sins are forgiven? When we look at ourselves and our sins, we must often come close to despair, but when we look to God and to our crucified and risen Savior and to the promises that God has given us in Him, we can be sure, because God does not lie. Amen.

Genesis in the New Testament

David Lau

Genesis Four

First Reading: Genesis 4: 1-8 Second Reading: Genesis 4: 9-16

Texts: Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3: 11-12; Jude 10-11; Hebrews 12:24

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.

But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

... to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command by eating the forbidden fruit, they died as God said they would. No, they did not die physically at once. The Bible says that Adam lived for 930 years before he died, and perhaps Eve lived a long time also. But both Adam and Eve did die spiritually. In fact, there was no spiritual good in them whatsoever after their sin, until God of His own free will and in amazing love for them pronounced a curse on His enemy and their enemy, Satan.

Since the words of this curse comprise the very first Gospel promise, we should treasure these words highly and memorize them if we can. God said to the devil: **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”**

The devil thought that by his deception of Eve he would gain total control over her life, that she would do his bidding from that moment on. But God said: No, it will not work out that way. I, God, shall see to it that this woman will hate you and detest you, and that her seed

likewise will fight against you and your seed in continuing warfare, and finally her Seed will take away your power by bruising or crushing your head in a battle in which you will bruise His heel.

Now Adam and Eve had something to live for and look forward to. Their sin had changed their lives for the worse. We can well imagine how many times during the next 900 years or so they bitterly regretted what they had done. But still there was hope. Their Creator, in undeserved mercy and kindness to them, had promised that Someone born to woman would crush the serpent's head and take away the power of this one, their old evil foe.

They had no idea how long it would be before God would keep this promise. It is very possible that when their first son was born, they believed that he was the promised Woman's Seed. For they gave him the name Cain, which means Possession, and Eve said: **"I have gotten a man from the Lord."** The Hebrew language also permits the translation: **"I have gotten a Man, namely, the Lord."** Martin Luther and others have believed that by these words she was expressing her hope that this first-born son would be the promised Savior. By the time the second boy was born, she must have known better, for this second son was given the name Abel, which means Vanity or Worthless.

Today we want to see **WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT CAIN AND ABEL**, not only in Genesis, chapter four, but in our four brief texts from the New Testament. Adam and Eve must have hoped that Cain would be the promised Seed who would destroy the power of Satan. But as it turned out, Cain became the first in a long line of human beings born to women to be of the seed of Satan, rather than the Seed of the woman. For God had said that Satan also would have seed, that is, those who would do the devil's bidding and not resist his temptations.

The apostle John says: **"Cain was of the wicked one and murdered his brother."** How long Cain was of the wicked one or the seed of Satan we do not know. But after the boys grew up and Cain became a farmer and Abel became a shepherd, they both brought sacrifices to the Lord. But the Bible says: **"The Lord did not respect Cain and his offering."** It is clear that when Cain brought his offering to the Lord, he was already **"of the wicked one."** To outward appearances he was worshipping the Lord God and bringing an offering to glorify God. But God knew Cain's heart. God knew that Cain was a hypocrite and that he was in reality **"of the wicked one"** in spite of his sacrifice.

Cain responded to God's non-acceptance of his offering with anger. He was **"very angry."** God warned him to rule over his anger and the sin that threatened to destroy him, but Cain did not listen. Hatred and jealousy and murder controlled his heart and thus he proved he was **"of the wicked one."**

But Genesis four says that **"the Lord respected Abel and his offering."** Yes, Abel was the worthless second son. Adam and Eve apparently had no high hopes for him. But God respected him and his offering. The Bible clearly points out the difference between Cain and Abel. **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CAIN AND ABEL IS THAT ABEL OFFERED HIS SACRIFICE BY FAITH.** For it is written: **"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."**

Cain was **"of the wicked one."** He was the seed of the devil. There was no faith in his heart with reference to God's promise of the Woman's Seed. Eve may have thought at first that Cain was that Seed, but Cain himself did not even believe the promise. Since God's promise meant nothing to him, God's word of warning meant nothing to him either. He went through the motion of serving the Lord and thought God should reward him for taking the time for an offering and using the fruit of his hard toil for such an offering. But, you see, without faith it is impossible to please God, no matter how many precious offerings one may bring to Him.

Abel, on the other hand, knew the promise of the Woman's Seed, the Savior, and trusted in that promise. That is why he and his offering were accepted. **"Through his faith he obtained**

witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

When Adam and Eve had children, their children were no longer in the image of God, as Adam and Eve had been. They were in the image of their sinful parents. Abel was a sinner. His name was accurate. He was a worthless sinner in the sight of God, as are we all. But there was that promise of a Savior, and this promise Abel believed. And as always, when someone trusts in God’s promise of a Savior, that person is counted righteous in God’s sight. Justification by faith – this is God’s teaching from the beginning of the Bible to the end. **“The just shall live by his faith.” “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.”** Jesus Himself called Abel righteous when He talked about **“all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah.”**

THE DEEDS OF BELIEVERS LIKE ABEL ARE RIGHTEOUS, BUT UNBELIEVERS’ DEEDS ARE ALWAYS UNRIGHTEOUS. Cain needed to be born again. Cain in his sinful condition needed to look to the Woman’s Seed for salvation and hope. But there is no indication that Cain ever repented or came to faith in the promised Savior. Therefore there is no way he could ever please God by anything he did. **“Cain was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.”**

In Cain and Abel we see God’s promise coming to pass: the enmity between the devil’s seed and the woman’s seed. Cain, of the seed of Satan, hated his brother because his brother was a believer in the Woman’s Seed who did good things in his faith. As believers in Jesus, we know that the fruits of our faith are acceptable to God. But the Bible says: **“Woe to”** the unbelievers who resist God’s warnings and corrupt themselves like animals. **“For they have gone in the way of Cain.”** The way of Cain is the way of unbelief, the way of hatred and jealousy and murder and impenitence and self-pity and defiance. God asked Cain: **“Where is Abel your brother?”** And his reply: **“I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”**

God’s will is that we love one another as brothers, that we feel a sense of responsibility for each other. But there was none of this in Cain. Abel’s blood cried out to God from the ground. What did Abel’s blood say? It said: Cain must be punished for shedding innocent blood, and so he was. **ABEL’S BLOOD SHED BY CAIN CRIED FOR VENGEANCE**, but the Bible tells us of **THE BLOOD OF ANOTHER** that **PROCLAIMS FORGIVENESS AND LOVE**.

For it is written to us who believe in Jesus: **“You have come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”** Abel’s blood cannot save us. He could not even save himself by his own blood. The most that Abel’s blood could do was cry out for the punishment of sin. Abel was saved by believing in the promised Woman’s Seed who would have His heel bruised in the battle against Satan. This Woman’s Seed is Jesus, and His blood poured out on the cross proclaims for all time God’s message of total forgiveness for all sinners and every kind of sin.

May we walk by faith in Jesus, as Abel did.

Abel’s blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies;
But the blood of Jesus
For our pardon cries. Amen! (TLH 158:4)

Genesis Five and Six

First Reading: Genesis 5:21 - 6:4

Second Reading: Genesis 6: 5-19

Texts: Hebrews 11: 5-6; Jude 14-15

By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

In one of our texts for today Jude calls Enoch **“the seventh from Adam.”** When we look into Genesis, we find that this is true. First there was Adam, the first man of all, made in the image of God. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s commandment and brought sin and death into the world. Their first son, Cain, became guilty of murdering his own brother Abel. But God gave Adam and Eve another son to replace Abel. His name was Seth and he was the second from Adam. The Bible says that Adam begot Seth **“in his own image”** rather than in the image of God. Of course Adam had many, many other sons and daughters in his long life of 930 years. But Seth is mentioned by name, because he is the one through whom the promise of the Woman’s Seed was to be kept. In reading Genesis we always have to remember this original promise: that the Woman’s Seed would come and take away the power of Satan. Abel lived and died by faith in this promise, and so did all the other believers of that age.

Seth passed on the promise to his son Enosh, the third from Adam. Then came Cainan, the fourth from Adam; then Mahalaleel, the fifth from Adam; then Jared, the sixth from Adam; and then Enoch, the man spoken of in our texts, **“the seventh from Adam.”** All of these men lived long, long lives by our standards. Adam – 930. Seth – 912. Enosh – 905. That is the way it was in those times before the great flood. After the flood, man’s life expectancy rapidly decreased, so that Moses was able to say in the 90th Psalm: **“The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”**

But in those years before the flood men lived to be 900 years and more. The result of this was that when Enoch was born 622 years after the creation of the world, all of his ancestors were still living. Adam was the oldest at 622, and all of the others were still alive also. Seven generations – all living at the same time. You see how easy it was for Adam to transmit the promise of the Savior to his descendants after him.

Concerning the five persons between Adam and Enoch in the line of the Savior Genesis says almost nothing. But when we come to Enoch, something very remarkable is said in Genesis, and our two New Testament texts add to our knowledge. This morning, then let us consider **WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT ENOCH, “the seventh from Adam.”**

First of all, God tells us in His Word that **ENOCH LIVED AS A GODLY BELIEVER IN AN INCREASINGLY WICKED WORLD.** The first baby Cain grew up to be a murderer, and it was not long before **“the wickedness of man was great in the earth”** and **“the earth was filled with violence.”** The leaders in this wickedness and violence were the children of Cain. They were talented individuals. They became leaders in the world. Cain himself built a city and named it after his son Enoch. Pretty soon there was a wicked man by the name of Lamech who took two wives instead of one – and boasted to his wives that he had killed a man and dared anyone to punish him for it. Lamech’s sons were great men in the eyes of the world. There was Jabal, a tent-dweller, a cattle-man, a rancher. There was Jubal, the father of music. There was Tubalcain, a craftsman in bronze and iron. On the basis of this information we need to erase from our minds any thoughts that the first people on earth were stupid or brutish. Oh, no, they were highly intelligent. They were not stone age cave-dwellers. They were brilliant, but they were

also wicked. Notice that leadership in the world did not come from the descendants of Seth, who believe in the promise of a Savior, but from the descendants of Cain. Believers are not very often prominent in this world.

As time passed on, the wickedness in the world increased. One reason: **“the sons of God”** married **“the daughters of men.”** That is, believing men married unbelieving women, and their children in particular became leaders in violence.

But what about Enoch, **“the seventh from Adam”**? What was his life like in the midst of this increasing corruption? Genesis says simply: **“Enoch walked with God.”** Surely he lived and moved on the earth, but his thoughts were centered on God and on what God had promised. He lived his life to please God. Hebrews explains it this way: **“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death.... Before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”**

The fact that Enoch walked with God and thus pleased God is proof positive to the writer of Hebrews that Enoch walked by faith. There is no such thing as godly living by an unbeliever. **“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”** We noted that in the case of Cain. Cain and his offering were unacceptable to God because Cain himself was not a believer.

Now where does faith come from? Faith comes from hearing the Word of God. Enoch heard the word and promise of God concerning the coming of the Savior, and God worked faith in his heart through this promise. This is one of the most wonderful miracles in all the world: the creation of faith in a person's heart. Such a person certainly believes in the existence of God. He believes that God is, and he believes what God has promised, and he diligently seeks to receive what God has promised. Enoch's prime concern was not the building of cities or working in metal or developing a ranch or inventing new music like the descendants of Cain. Enoch's concern was the reality of God and the rewards that God had promised in His Word to those who seek Him. Enoch walked with God. He lived by faith.

But this does not mean that Enoch was an absent-minded dreamer who was unaware of what was going on in the world around him. Enoch was well aware of the advances in wickedness. He knew that the holiness of God and the wickedness of man were on a collision course that could have only one ending. So Enoch prophesied: **“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints (holy ones, meaning angels) to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”** Walking with God as a believer in God's promise, Enoch was troubled by the ungodliness in the world and he testified against it. The judgment he foretold came to pass in the days of the flood, and it will come to our world also on the last day, when this world and everything in it will be burned up and sinners will face the God they disobeyed and rejected.

But now when Enoch was 308 years old, he and all his family experienced the death of their father Adam. Certainly they had heard from Adam's lips many times what God had said to him: **“Dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”** And now it happened. Adam died, and his body returned to dust. They had witnessed death before in that violent world, but now Adam himself was gone.

In view of this death and other deaths the believers in those days needed some tangible sign that God had not forgotten His promise to send a Savior to defeat the devil and destroy death. They had God's promise, and they believed this promise. But God now gave them something else to hang on to in those dark days. **ENOCH WAS TAKEN BY GOD TO HIMSELF WITHOUT HAVING EXPERIENCED DEATH, AS A TESTIMONY THAT VICTORY OVER DEATH IS OURS ONLY BY FAITH IN THE PROMISED SAVIOR.**

Enoch was a believer. He walked with God. Both believers and unbelievers knew the kind of man he was. And suddenly, 57 years after Adam died, Enoch **“was not, for God took him.”** Enoch did not die. God took him without dying. **“He was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found because God had taken him.’”**

Enoch was certainly a sinner like Adam. Why did he not die? Because God chose to give Enoch at once what all believers shall receive on the Last Day. That is the final victory over death, won for us by the Woman’s Seed, Jesus Christ, who **“through death destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”** Jesus crushed the serpent’s head when He died on the cross and rose again. He won this victory for us. Enoch believed in this promise, and God gave him an immediate reward of grace. Whoever believes in the Lord will not be put to shame. **“God took him.”**

By faith in the same Savior we have the victory over death. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are already ours through Jesus Christ. And when we die as believers in Jesus, we know that God on the Last Day will raise us up from the dead to live with Him forever, together with Enoch and all believers in Jesus Christ. O Lord, give us

Faith and hope to walk with God
In the way that Enoch trod.” Amen! (TLH 342:3)

Genesis Seven and Eight

First Reading: Genesis 7:11-24 Second Reading: Genesis 8:13-22

Texts: 2 Peter 2:5; 2 Pet. 3:6; 1 Pet. 3:20; Heb. 11:7

God did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.

The world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

They formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Last week, when 20 inches of rain fell in the Twin Cities area in a two-day period, a young man was quoted as saying: ‘I thought the Lord was sending another flood, and I was waiting for Noah’s ark to come by.’ The heavy rains that we experience now and then do have a way of reminding us of the story of the flood and how Noah and his family were preserved in the ark.

However, to many people the story of the flood is just a story. They don’t believe it really ever happened in the way the Bible describes it. The story of the flood and Noah’s ark occupies a place in their minds similar to the story of the ugly duckling or the woman who lived in a shoe. Somehow, Noah’s ark has come to be pictured as this cute little boat that would hardly have room for eight human occupants, let alone pairs of all the various kinds of animals and birds in the world.

But, of course, when we look at Scripture, we find Noah’s ark described in a much different way. It is shaped more like a huge barge. Its length was 300 cubits, its width was 50 cubits, and its height was 30 cubits. A cubit is generally figured as about a foot and a half. Therefore the measurements in feet would be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. The length then would be the length of 1½ football fields. And, remember, there were three levels or stories to the ark. Someone has determined that the storage space of the ark would be equivalent

to over 500 railroad stock cars. In other words, it is described as an enormous ship, very much different from the usual pictures of Noah's ark.

There are those today who claim that the remains of Noah's ark can still be seen in the mountains of Ararat in modern-day Turkey. No doubt the discovery of a vessel that matches the description of the ark in Genesis would be an exciting find – perhaps some deniers of Scripture might even be moved to reconsider their ungodly theories. But regardless of what kinds of discoveries are made in the Ararat mountains, our faith in the flood as a real event and in Noah's ark as a real ship rests on **WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT NOAH AND THE FLOOD** in the Bible. Without doubt the Bible describes the flood as a real event that once took place in history. Moreover, it was a universal flood that covered the highest mountains on the earth at that time. Our Lord Jesus Himself said in plain words: **“They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.”** There we have it from the lips of Jesus Himself. We need no more proof. There was a universal flood, and there was a man named Noah whose life was preserved in an ark.

What was the purpose of this great flood? The Bible answers that **THE GREAT FLOOD REVEALS THE RIGHTEOUS WRATH OF THE ALMIGHTY GOD**. The apostle Peter writes in his second letter: **“God did not spare the ancient world, ... bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.”** Again Peter says in this same letter: **“The world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.”**

The Lord God Himself created that ancient world. And when He finished creating it, He saw that it was **“very good.”** Yet 1,656 years after God created it, He destroyed it. Why? Because the almighty, holy, and righteous God looked down on the world He had made, and He saw ungodliness. God in His holiness hates ungodliness, and must punish it. So God said: **“I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”** The problem with the ancient world was man. **“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”**

The problem was man. Adam and Eve had disobeyed God's command and followed Satan's suggestions. This brought sin into the world, and this sin affected all the descendants of Adam and Eve. The rest of creation was not ungodly in the way man was ungodly, but the rest of creation was put under God's curse because of man's sin. And in those 1,656 years things went from bad to worse. The Bible uses the words **“corruption”** and **“violence”** to describe that world.

The great flood then came as a revelation of God's righteous wrath. **“He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground.”** But as tremendous as an event as the flood was, it did not and could not eradicate sin. For after the flood we hear God saying: **“The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.”** So even though the world was changed, man's heart was not changed: ungodly before the flood – ungodly after the flood.

And what about our world today? It's the same thing. Ungodliness abounds, and God is angry. **“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”** God looks into our hearts and sees our sin, and He hates it. And what shall He do about it? **“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. ... The earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”** As certainly as God destroyed the ancient world by means of a flood, so certainly will He destroy our present world by means of fire.

But many people do not believe this. They say the world has been ungodly before, and nothing has happened. Why should it be any different now? No doubt that's what they said before the flood also. The Lord God was patient. As Peter says: **“The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared.”** God gave that ungodly

generation 120 years to repent, and during that time there were Noah and the members of his family working on their ark. The building of the ark in itself was one way Noah preached righteousness to his generation.

In the same way today God is patient, much more patient than we would be if we saw our creation polluted, and our laws flouted, and our name disgraced, and we would have the power to do something about it. God has the power, and He will most surely use it. His delay is for only one reason. **“The Lord is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”**

In the days before the flood no one came to repentance except Noah himself and his immediate family. Only eight persons – Noah, his three sons, and their four wives – were saved in the ark. GOD’S PRESERVATION OF NOAH AND HIS FAMILY REVEALS GOD’S COVENANT KINDNESS AND MERCY. Genesis says: **“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”** Grace, indeed! For Noah also was a sinner, and God could justly have destroyed him too. But God had earlier made a promise that the Woman’s Seed would come to crush the head of the serpent. If God had destroyed all human beings, He would have broken His own Word, and that He cannot do. If all had died in the flood, there could be no Woman’s Seed. Therefore someone’s life had to be preserved – in fact, two persons had to survive, a male and a female, to keep the Woman’s Seed from dying out on the earth.

God in His grace went further than just keeping two persons alive. As Peter says: **“Eight souls were saved through water.”** And again he says: **“God saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness.”**

But God did more than just preserve the life of Noah and his family. God worked in Noah’s heart, so that Noah believed the promise of the Woman’s Seed that was coming to be man’s Savior. In fact Noah believed everything God said to him about the flood and the ark, and he acted on that faith by building the ark and becoming a preacher of righteousness. For it is written: **“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which He condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”** Noah was not a morally perfect person, either before or after the flood. After the flood he even became drunk on one occasion. But by faith in God’s precious promise of a Savior he was righteous in God’s sight. His sins were forgiven.

Our only hope in our ungodly world is to believe as Noah believed in God’s covenant kindness and mercy, that is, to take God at His Word, both in His promises of forgiveness and His threats of judgment. The Woman’s Seed is Jesus, and He has won the victory over sin and death by dying for our sins and rising again. In Him our sins are forgiven. He has delivered us from the wrath to come. Yes, Jesus is our ark, designed by God for our eternal protection and safety. May God give us continuing faith in Him. Amen!

(To be continued)

A Book Review

A Tale of Two Synods by Mark Braun
Northwestern Publishing House, 2003

John K. Pfeiffer

What is the Church of the Lutheran Confession? Is it an organization or is it people? Of course the answer is obvious. As an organization, the CLC began its existence in 1960. As a people, the history of the members of the CLC extends into a past long before this date.

The history of our people is varied. The majority can trace their synodical backgrounds to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Others have a heritage in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS - original name: the Norwegian Synod), the Missouri Synod (LCMS), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) or its predecessor bodies, as well as other church bodies. Therefore, when one speaks of the history of the CLC, he is speaking not only of the span of time between 1960 and the present, but also of the time when the people were still in the WELS, ELS, ELCA, etc. The pre-1960 history of these church bodies is a part of the history of the CLC, also.

For this reason, a recent publication from Northwestern Publishing House should be of particular interest to the members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. In *A Tale of Two Synods* Prof. Mark Braun¹ traces the history of the relationship between the WELS and the LCMS from the last half of the nineteenth century to the present. As one walks with Prof. Braun through the unfolding stages of history, one meets church leaders, who can correctly be called “the church fathers of the CLC.” Likewise one observes decisions and events of the last century which contributed to the formation of the CLC.

A Tale of Two Synods is not a dry recounting of stale facts and figures. Prof. Braun presents a history not of facts and figures, but of people and forces at work. It breathes in the lives and words of real people. His book is replete with quotations from correspondence, essays, synodical publications, convention reports, and personal interviews.

While Prof. Braun is a member of the WELS, it is evident that he attempted to present this history in an objective manner. This is appreciated by those who are not members of the WELS.

While the above may be true, it would be unfair to imply that Prof. Braun ignored his own synodical ties. As his historical account draws closer the present day, his ties become more evident. The closing chapter is filled with sympathy towards the WELS for the difficulties that they faced in earlier years, as they were struggling with the meaning of God-pleasing confessionalism.

Beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Prof. Braun tracks the history of the two synods in America. He is honest in pointing to the weaknesses and errors of the Wisconsin Synod in its early days. He also acknowledges the important part that the Missouri Synod, especially under the leadership of C.F.W. Walther, played in helping the Wisconsin Synod to reject its errors and grow in strength through the faithful Word.

Yet it was not entirely the work of Missouri that resulted in the increasing commitment to the truth. While there were voices in Wisconsin calling for a “milder confessional stance,” there were also those who urged the body to take a more solid stand on the Lutheran confessions. Names such as Johannes Weinmann, William Wrede, Johannes Bading, Adolf Hoenecke, Gottlieb Reim, Philipp Koehler, and Elias Sauer stand out as defenders of the truth. These names also remind many in our midst of our own roots.

As time passed the two synods drew closer together, until they were moving side-by-side, confessionally united and committed to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Like two lines converging, the synods approached the new century moving along close, parallel lines.

Their closeness found expression in the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, constituted in 1872.

At the same time, Prof. Braun reveals an underlying tension. The Wisconsin Synod viewed the Missouri Synod as being somewhat arrogant. Quoting August Pieper, he writes, ‘Missourians boasted that they were ‘the only ones who are completely orthodox and competent,’ manifesting that attitude not only toward Lutheran bodies outside their fellowship ‘but also toward those which in the course of time were recognized as sufficiently Lutheran’ — undoubtedly a reference to the Wisconsin Synod” (55).

In the same series of articles for the *Quartalschrift*, Prof. Pieper ‘characterized Missouri’s spirit as ‘remarkably intense,’ a ‘strongly pronounced synodical patriotism, a strong tendency to stick together, not only against all enemies, but also over against friendly synods.’” (53)

This tension did not go away. In his conclusion, Prof. Braun writes of a sense of ‘betrayal and hurt’ felt by members of the WELS. There appeared to have been the feeling that they were being patronized by the LCMS in the 1940’ s and 50’ s . treated like the little brother in the family. Indeed, in a questionnaire sent out to 105 WELS pastors, one of the eight questions that Prof. Braun asked was this: ‘Some of the observers have commented on a ‘triumphalist’ or ‘cocksure’ attitude in the Missouri Synod in previous generations and a corresponding feeling of ‘small Synoditis’ on the part of Wisconsin. Based on your experience, would you agree or disagree with that observation?’

One of the observations made by one who entered the LCMS ministry in 1920 was that “‘the doctrinal stance of the Synod rested quite heavily upon the opinions of the fathers.’ Walther, Stoeckhardt, Pieper, and *Lehre und Wehre* were ‘constantly quoted as authorities in theological matters’”(45).

This is not the only manner in which the Missouri Synod has relied on the writings of men. It has been the observation of this reviewer over the years that the Missouri Synod has repeatedly quoted their constitution, when they should have been quoting the Bible. This seeming reliance on the writings of men may have contributed to the downfall of the synod. The writings of men do not possess the power that is found in the writings of God. The reason for faithfulness to the truth is not “because the constitution says so,” but because God says so.

To what degree the attitude of superiority (real or imagined) contributed to the eventual demise of the Synodical Conference cannot be measured. However, repeated observations and quotations throughout Prof. Braun’s book seem to indicate the underlying feelings.

This is not to say that psychological clashes were the root cause of the battles within the Synodical Conference. There can be no doubt that, beginning in the late 1930’ s, members of the LCMS were lifting up the banner of liberalism. The failure of the synod to discipline its erring members in a scriptural manner led to the inevitable: the synod itself assumed possession of the banner, adopting and defending error.

A Tale of Two Synods traces the development of controversies between the WELS and the LCMS. Prof. Braun cites the following issues: the doctrine of church and ministry, the chaplaincy, ‘Boy Scoutism,’ and finally the doctrine of church fellowship. For years the debates went on with no settlement regarding any of these issues. At the 1946 convention of the Synodical Conference, S.C. Ylvisaker of the Norwegian Synod (ELS) preached the opening sermon, in which ‘he issued stinging rebukes of unionism, joint prayer, and disagreements over church and ministry, the chaplaincy, and Scouting. ‘These difficulties are real, and they dare not be put aside as if they did not belong within the realm of a doctrinal debate’”(226).

Looking with hindsight, one may wonder why it took so long to come to grips with the reality of the situation. However, it is difficult for the modern generation to appreciate the impact

of world events, such as World War II, on such matters. This reviewer appreciates the fact that Prof. Braun offered some insight into these things.

Nevertheless, the spirit of error was present in the LCMS. The milestone that marks the revelation of this spirit was the year 1935 (only three years after they had adopted the remarkable confessional document: *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*). It was then that the LCMS in convention authorized the appointment of the "Committee on Lutheran Union." The intent was to reach out to other Lutheran bodies, such as the American Lutheran Church (ALC). Although the convention stated that there must be agreement in doctrine before fellowship can be declared, the very fact that this effort was being made gave evidence that a change had taken place within Missouri.

The ALC had long been recognized within the Synodical Conference as a false teaching church body. Furthermore, there were no indications that the ALC was changing. Since that was true, then it must have been changes in the LCMS that prompted the push toward fellowship with the ALC.

In 1938 the Missouri Synod placed its *Brief Statement* alongside the *Declarations of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church* (the Sandusky Resolutions) as the basis for future fellowship between the two bodies. While the *Brief Statement* was an excellent confessional statement, it lost its luster when it was interpreted in the light of the Sandusky Resolutions. Doctrines which had been clearly stated now became obscure, and false teachers within both the ALC and the LCMS felt free to propagate their errors.

Throughout the 1940' s debates raged between the members of the Synodical Conference. It became apparent that Missouri had adopted a new position on the doctrine of fellowship. Prof. Braun brings the focus on a new distinction that Missouri was making . . . a distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship.² This distinction allowed for joint prayer with those of a different confession as long as the objective was honorable.

Light was cast on this distinction in the "Brux case;" this was followed by the 1944 resolution on prayer fellowship and, one year later, the "Statement of the 44." In each of these instances, the false teaching regarding fellowship was being developed and defended.

The distinction that Missouri was making led the Wisconsin Synod to reexamine what the Bible has to say about prayer and fellowship. The study led to an understanding of the "unit concept" of fellowship, which requires that there is to be agreement in doctrine before there can be any expression of fellowship. "We shall continue to speak of one fellowship," wrote Edmund Reim,³ "one *koinonia*, which manifests itself in many ways." Prayer, altar, and pulpit fellowship "are not so many different fellowships, but outstanding ways in which this one great fellowship manifests itself among Christians" (2 06).

While Missouri was claiming that the difference was in the area of application rather than doctrine, Braun demonstrates that it was a doctrinal issue.

During the 1950s, the Wisconsin Synod repeated and clarified its teaching that weak Christians are to be dealt with in patience and love until they reveal themselves as "persistent errorists." In 1954, a Wisconsin author granted that "there are those Christians who may be caught in an error, not willingly, but because their understanding of Scripture is insufficient," and he urged that praying with such Christians "may well be in place and God pleasing" so that "God will help [them] to grow in knowledge and strength." But the Wisconsin Synod found it impossible to regard an entire church body as a "weak brother." To continue offering joint prayer with a synod after it had revealed itself to be a persistently erring church body was viewed by Wisconsin as a change in understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship itself, not merely a change of application in doubtful or difficult circumstances. (191 - The quotes come from one [#10] of a series of tracts produced by the WELS Conference of Presidents)

By 1955 the relationship between the two synods had reached a breaking point. Missouri and the ALC had attempted to produce a document which could serve as a basis for establishing fellowship between the two bodies. In 1944 there was the *Doctrinal Affirmation*. In 1950 there was the *Common Confession*. However, as Prof. Braun quotes the editor of *The Lutheran* (in a reference to the *Common Confession*), “The document didn’t try to solve the old problems — it buried them” (297). It was evident that Missouri had no intention of rejecting its errors and embracing the truth. In point of fact, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod had become a false teaching church body.

The leaven of error was also fermenting in other areas of Christian doctrine. Even the all important doctrine of inspiration was coming under attack. There were pastors and professors in the LCMS who were denying the inerrancy of the Scriptures. The truth of the passage is manifested: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9).

While there were such internal struggles in the LCMS, the errors of certain false teachers had not yet become the errors of the body. (However, when a church body fails to carry out God’s commands regarding causes of divisions and offenses, the body itself becomes guilty of the errors [cf. 2 John 11].) The area of concern among the member synods of the Synodical Conference remained the doctrine of church fellowship. In connection with this doctrine, Missouri had embraced the error and made it her own.

An increasing number of voices were being heard within the WELS stating that Missouri had become guilty of causing divisions and offenses. The call for termination of fellowship was increasing in volume. At the 1955 convention of the WELS, the new president, Oscar Naumann,

. . . stated that the Missouri Synod was guilty of causing the divisions and offenses spoke (sic) of in Romans 16:17. “For those of us closest to these problems” it seemed “quite definite” that the Wisconsin Synod must now obey the command of the passage to “avoid them.”

Yet Naumann urged the delegates to “implore the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us” as the synod had to decide whether now was the proper time to apply that command or “whether we still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years.” The ambivalence Naumann expressed was manifest in the actions Wisconsin conventions took in 1955, 1956, and 1957. Wisconsin’s seeming inability to act decisively aggravated tensions already simmering within the synod and precipitated an internal struggle that led to the departure of dozens of congregations from the synod when it postponed breaking with Missouri. [JKP: These include the congregations that united to form the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Prof. Braun’s explanation of the withdrawal of these congregations perpetuates the contention of WELS that they withdrew over a difference in timing. Whereas this may be true of individuals, it was not the final reason for our separation from the WELS. Prof. Braun later acknowledges, quoting a paper by Paul F. Nolting, that the actions of the members of the CLC was “not a matter of timing but of doctrinal disagreement” (243).]

The Standing Committee on Church Union recommended to the 1955 convention that “with deepest sorrow” the Wisconsin Synod must terminate its fellowship with the Missouri Synod. . . The convention’s floor committee agreed with the Standing Committee’s judgment (that Missouri was “guilty of causing divisions and offenses” - JKP) . . . Yet it felt “constrained” to offer a resolution that action be delayed until a recessed session in 1956 because of the “far reaching spiritual consequences” of the resolution. . .

Asked whether Romans 16:17 applied now or only in 1956, the floor committee chair answered: “Divisions and offenses are sufficient for cessation of fellowship. Most of the committee feels that it shouldn’t apply now. Others don’t agree. I think we agree that we

aren't ready to agree on its application. . . We feel that [Romans 16:17] *is* applicable now, but feel that for other reasons we should defer. . .

. . . Convention delegates unanimously adopted the preamble of the resolution, recognizing Missouri as a "persistently erring" church body. The resolution itself, calling for postponement of terminating fellowship until 1956, was adopted by a standing vote of 97 to 47 (231-233).

Thus, the historical observation of Prof. Braun is that the Wisconsin Synod agreed that Missouri was a false teaching church body, but that the WELS failed at that time to apply the Lord's injunction to "avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). Pres. Naumann's address to the convention, followed by the resolution of the floor committee, set the stage for a change in doctrine of the WELS.

Note: It is interesting to note that Prof. Braun includes pre-1959 quotes from the founding fathers of the CLC, which appear to support the final position of the WELS. This reviewer is aware that there were statements made in the past, which the makers, if they were still in this world, would reject. In fact some of the makers did publicly express their regret that they said some of the things they did. Regardless of what they would say today, if their past statements meant what Prof. Braun implies and if they were in error, then they were in error. The fact of the matter is that these men finally understood the error that was arising and being defended within WELS and they obeyed the Lord's directive. Wisconsin, on the other hand, embraced the error and disobeyed the Lord. Even when they finally severed relations with Missouri, it was not in obedience to the Lord, but in obedience to the will of the majority.

Until this time, the confessional position of the WELS was correct. However, after applying Rom. 16:17 to Missouri (to the extent that Missouri was recognized as causing "divisions and offenses"), but failing to apply Rom. 16:17 to themselves (to the extent that Wisconsin should heed the Lord and "avoid them"), Wisconsin began to defend their actions by changing the meaning of Rom. 16:17.

Prof. E.E. Kowalke is quoted by Braun as inserting the concept of human judgment into Romans 16:17. Note well that this is after Missouri was recognized as a false teaching church. Thus human judgment is inserted between "marking" and "avoiding." He also warned of the dangers of avoiding: complacency, self-righteousness, misplaced proof for orthodoxy and Christianity, disregard for the weak, labeling of those who differ (236f.). All of these are very real dangers for every Christian, but hardly become good reasons for disobeying the commands of the Lord and hardly offer justification for altering His words.

It was this kind of thinking that helped to forge a change in the WELS' doctrine on church fellowship. That change started taking substantive form in 1958, when the Protest Committee of the Wisconsin Synod endorsed a document (*A Report to the Protest Committee*), which included this statement:

"Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error."

Prof. Braun does not refer to these words nor to the impact that they had on those who withdrew from WELS. Indeed, these words could have been ignored by the author and might have been overlooked by those who formed the CLC, if they had remained the words of one man. However, in 1959 the WELS in convention made that doctrine its own (another fact that Prof. Braun does not report; considering the fact that Prof. Braun goes into some detail regarding the conventions of 1955, 1957, and 1961, it strikes this reviewer as more than unusual that little is said about the convention of 1959). It was at this convention that WELS declared that the statement of *A Report* was in agreement with the doctrinal statement that the convention formulated at that time.

In the *Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Convention, The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, August 5 to 12, 1959*, a memorial named, "A Call for Decision," included the above quote and labeled it as false and unscriptural. The memorial called upon the synod to disavow it. The reply of the convention was as follows (*Proceedings*, 211):

Resolution No. 1 - Subject: Disavowal of Serious Charges

WHEREAS, The context in which the statement which is attacked in "A Call For Decision" occurs, shows that there is no conflict between its intended meaning and the thesis (B, 5b - see below) in the Statement on Fellowship, a statement with which one of the signers of "A Call For Decision" publicly agreed, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Synod disavow the serious and repeated charges made in "A Call For Decision," such as: "we hold that it (the statement under attack – the Committee) is false and unscriptural, and that the argument based upon it is rationalistic and untenable."

[B,5b: "We can no longer recognize and treat as Christian brethren those who in spite of patient admonition persistently adhere to an error in doctrine or practice, demand recognition for their error, and make propaganda for it. Gal. 1:8, 9; 5:9; Matt. 7:15-19; 16:6; 2 Tim. 2:17-19; 2 John 9-11; Rom. 16: 17,18. If the error does not overthrow the foundation of saving faith, the termination of fellowship is not to be construed as an excommunication. Moreover an excommunication can only apply to an individual, not to a congregation or larger church group. — The 'avoid them' of Rom. 16:17,18 excludes any contact that would be an acknowledgment and manifestation of church fellowship; it calls for a cessation of every further joint expression of faith. Cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-11. Compare Walther' s Theses 9 and 10.]"

This resolution left the protesters with no choice but to interpret Resolution B, 5b in the light of the "statement" of the Protest Committee. Since the synod rejected the charge that the "statement" was "false and unscriptural," they were declaring it to be true and scriptural. As for the claim that the context of the "statement" places it in a correct and scriptural light, this was rejected by the protesters. No amount of context could make this "statement" true; it is patently false.

Furthermore, subsequent actions on the part of the Wisconsin Synod demonstrated that this was indeed the principle upon which their actions were made. Wisconsin had taken a divine decision and turned it into a human one. No longer was it simple obedience to God's command ("avoid them"). Now it became a matter of human beings trying to determine if the false teacher is going to accept admonition.

How blessed we are that God did not subject us to making judgments like this. Dealing with false teachers would become an impossibility. Man's only role is to "*test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1). In this, also, the judge is God; He has established the truth and therefore He labels as false all that is contrary. Man's role is to take the truth of God, compare it with the teaching in question, and then admonish the person who is in error. If that person consents to the truth and rejects his error, all is well. If he rejects the truth and continues to teach his error, he is a false teacher; "avoid him." Continuing in fellowship with false teachers is contrary to the expressed will of God.

Note: It should be noted that a false teacher is such not by virtue of our recognition of him as such, but because of his own rejection of God's truth. We do not establish his identity as a false teacher; we only recognize an existing situation. Moreover, because he is what he is, it is incumbent upon us to discover him and bring a stop to his "divisive" and "offensive" ways in our midst. Thus we are urged in 1 John 4:1– *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

Yet the Wisconsin Synod did continue in fellowship until 1961, at which time 72 percent of the delegates to convention voted to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Prior to the decision Pastor James Schaefer stated:

There is nothing in the past history of this controversy that would tend to indicate to me that today, 4:30 P.M., August 17, 1961, and no other day, we must break fellowship with the Missouri Synod. The case today is no more hopeless, no more hopeful — than it ever was before (267).

He was right, if one accepts the WELS' doctrine on church fellowship. Pastor Schaefer had not yet reached the "conviction that admonition was of no further avail." What should such a man do? Should he accept the will of the majority of human beings? That was a truly difficult position for the minority in the WELS. Since WELS had made the decision to sever fellowship with false teachers a matter of human judgment, the obvious conclusion is that the decision to sever fellowship relations is not based on the fact that the other person (or church) is a false teacher, but on the fact that the false teacher is no longer responding to admonition.

This, of course, is not what the Lord says. He tells us simply to avoid false teachers. We may be afflicted by a failure to test the spirits or by a failure to recognize a false teacher when we see one. The fault is ours and places us in danger. However, once an identification has been made, avoidance is the only recourse. Continuance in fellowship, no matter how intense or sincere the admonition, is an act of disobedience which can only result in allowing the false teaching to spread, grow, and infect others.

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

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

The Wisconsin Synod continues to insist that its doctrinal position in 1959 is consistent with its present position and that the 1959 position contained no errors. Thus we are forced to understand their present position in the light of the 1959 position, making fellowship between the CLC and WELS impossible.

Finally, one thing this reviewer thought was lacking in *A Tale of Two Synods* was the author's conviction regarding the hand of God in the flow of history. Perhaps Prof. Braun wanted to leave this to the mind and heart of the reader. However, the impression left on this reviewer is that the flow of events was determined by the actions of men. The reader will have to develop his own impressions.

Our God shed the blood of His own Son to redeem us from sin and error. Having done so, He wants to spare us from the very real dangers that sin and error present. Thus, He issues both warnings and directives regarding temptation and false doctrine. Included is the directive to avoid false teachers. The very real danger is that they, by good words and fair speeches, will deceive us and lead us into error and that every error works like leaven spreading to infect the whole body of believers and the whole body of doctrine. Thus, even the Gospel itself is at risk.

History bears out the truthfulness of this, not that it is needed. May God help us to continue in our struggle against sin and error.

A Tale of Two Synods is an invaluable documentation of the history of our forefathers and their struggle against sin and error. Every pastor and teacher in the CLC would be well-advised to own a copy. It is easy reading, as well as interesting. (Copies are available through the CLC Book House.)

Endnotes

¹ Prof. Braun is currently a professor of theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

² It is sadly interesting to note that more recently the LCMS has learned to tolerate "joint prayer" even with the heathen. Note the recent vindication of Dr. David Benke's involvement in the unionistic prayer service at New York's Yankee Stadium, which involved leaders from many, different, world religions.

³ Prof. Edmund Reim became one of the founding fathers of the CLC.
