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(Reviewer: David Lau)

Genesis in the New Testament

David Lau

Genesis 50 (conclusion of sermon series)

First Reading: Gen. 50:15-21 Second Reading: Genesis 50:22-26

Texts: Hebrews 11:22; Romans 8:28-30

By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Genesis presents to us the fascinating life of Joseph from his early youth to the day of his death. When he was still a child, his father Jacob favored him above all his other sons. This, as one might expect, led to bitter hatred and jealousy. The Bible says, in fact, that Joseph's brothers "**could not speak peaceably to him**" because they hated him so much. Joseph himself contributed to their hatred by revealing some of his dreams, which seemed to indicate that he would be greater than his brothers and even greater than his parents, for one day they would all bow down to him. Even his father Jacob "**rebuked him**" for telling these dreams.

When Joseph was 17, his life at home came to an end. His brothers sold him into slavery for twenty pieces of silver and persuaded their father that a wild animal had killed him. In Egypt Joseph worked as a slave for an important man named Potiphar. Under these conditions everything went well for Joseph until he refused to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife. That is when he spoke those memorable words: **‘How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’** She turned against Joseph and lied about him, causing him to be thrown into prison, where he remained for many years. It surely did not seem as though his childhood dreams could come true.

Then one day, Joseph was summoned by the Pharaoh of Egypt himself to interpret the Pharaoh's dream, the dream of the seven skinny cows eating up the seven fat cows and remaining as skinny as before. God gave Joseph the meaning of this dream. There would be seven years of great plenty followed by seven years of great famine. The Pharaoh decided to put the former slave, Joseph, in charge of the immense task of saving food from the plentiful years for the years of famine to follow. When the famine began, Joseph was 37 years old, having lived in Egypt away from his family for 20 years. When his brothers came to Egypt to buy food, they did not recognize him. Joseph, on the other hand, recognized them and treated them in such a way as to lead them to repentance for their previous wicked behavior. When Joseph was 39 years old, he revealed himself to his brothers and made provisions for the entire family of his father to move to Egypt and live in the land of Goshen.

There is no doubt that Joseph had a God-given organizational ability. Wherever he was, he was always put in charge, and everything prospered under his care. Yet he was far from being a mechanical robot. He was a man with emotions, whom we find bursting into tears of joy on several occasions in his life. Only one characteristic of Joseph, however, is mentioned in our text from Hebrews, and that is his faith. Therefore we shall consider today **WHAT GOD SAYS** in His Word **ABOUT JOSEPH'S FAITH**.

Our text says: **‘By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instruction concerning his bones.’** Joseph had been responsible for moving Jacob's entire family from the land of Canaan to the land of Egypt during the great famine. But Joseph knew and believed what God had said to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he knew that Canaan was the promised land and that the stay in Egypt was intended to be only a temporary sojourning. **JOSEPH'S LAST INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE HIS DEATH REVEAL HIS FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES TO ISRAEL.** For what did he say? He made mention of the departure of the children of Israel. As he was dying, he said to all his relatives: **‘I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land (of Egypt) to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob’** (Gen. 50:24).

Why did Joseph think that the children of Israel would return to Canaan? There was no particular earthly reason for them to do so. The land of Goshen, where they were now living, was a good land. Joseph believed that they would return to Canaan simply because God had said it and sworn to it. Joseph believed God's promises to Israel, such as the one He spoke to Abraham: **‘Your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them 400 years; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. They shall return here.’** This was God's Word, which Joseph believed.

Because he believed it, he gave instructions concerning his bones. Since Joseph was a prominent man in Egypt, his body was embalmed in the Egyptian manner and placed in a coffin, probably a mummy case, which presumably preserved his remains for many years. Before he died, however, Joseph made his relatives swear an oath that they would save his bones and take them along to Canaan whenever God would cause His people to leave the land of Egypt and go to the land of promise. This was a very serious matter to Joseph, as we see from his words of instruction to his family: **‘You shall carry up my bones from here.’** Joseph was an Israelite,

not an Egyptian. His last instructions concerning his bones were his dying confession of faith in God's promises to Israel.

For hundreds of years Joseph's coffin or mummy case was there to serve as a constant reminder to the people what God had promised to Israel. How important that reminder was when the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves and afflicted them so grievously! Joseph's remains were there to remind them of God's promise. Consequently, when God kept His promise to deliver them, they kept their promise to Joseph by transporting his remains to the promised land of Canaan.

How blessed we would be to have this same faith and trust in every word that God has spoken to us! For example, God says that He created the world in six days, but few there are who believe the Bible's report in Genesis 1 and 2. They would rather accept the far-fetched, impossible-to-prove theories of ungodly men who despise God and hate His words. Yet if God says it happened, then that's the way it was. Who are we to argue against Him? As God said to Job: **"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?"**

When God says that He has delivered us from sin and death by sending Jesus from the tribe of Judah as our Savior and announces the complete forgiveness of our sins because of the Savior's life, death and resurrection, we too should believe this, for it is God's Word that He has sworn to us. God wants us to believe His Word and promise, as Joseph did. To reject the Word will only fulfill what is written in 1 John 5: **"He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son."**

Even as Joseph believed in God's future deliverance of Israel from Egypt because God had said it, so also we should believe what God says to us about death and dying, the end of the world, resurrection from the grave, and heaven and hell. What God says is all true, which leads us to say with the apostle Paul: **"The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me for His heavenly kingdom"** (2 Tim. 4:18).

Towards the end of his life Joseph had another experience which reveals the steadfastness of his faith. After Jacob had died, his brothers came to him in a humble, repentant spirit, concerned that Joseph would now punish them because of their earlier sins against him. But Joseph had no desire to get even with them for what they had done to him. He said to them: **"Do not be afraid.... As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."** JOSEPH'S COMFORTING WORDS TO HIS REPENTANT BROTHERS REVEAL HIS FAITH IN GOD'S MERCIFUL PROVIDENCE. There is no doubt that they had sinned against him. But God, in His wise and merciful rule over all things which happen on earth, actually made use of their sin to accomplish great good. That, of course, does not excuse their sin or make it any less sinful, but it does reveal God's astounding ability to make everything which happens work together as a pattern for good to those who are His.

The apostle Paul has made this point most eloquently in the familiar words of Romans 8: **"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."** Certainly we see the truth of these words in the story of Joseph and his brothers. The dreams that Joseph had were indicating God's plan to Joseph in advance. It all came to pass in marvelous ways that no one could have understood or predicted at the time. We too can sometimes look back at our lives and comprehend to some degree how God worked some evil into a pattern of events which brought blessing to us and to others.

We can't fully understand all of God's ways, of course. Yet this much He wants us to know. If God has through His Word brought us to faith in Jesus Christ, then let us realize that our conversion and the continual existence of our faith have happened according to God's purpose. This purpose of His was carried out as a certain part of His eternal plan for us. Yes, we who are believers in Jesus at this moment can be sure that God has chosen us from eternity to be His own and will surely keep us as His own even to all eternity. Everything that has happened to us or

will happen to us fits into God's merciful plan, which is constantly working for our eternal benefit. **'For those whom God foreknew [in love], He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.'** **"All things work together for good to those who are the called according to His purpose."** "My God has all things in His keeping, ... and all His ways in blessings end" (TLH 529:2). Amen!

Devotional Address: Romans 8:32 and other Scriptures of great comfort to Martin Luther

Walter Schaller

[Pastor Schaller delivered the following address as chaplain of the Fall 2004 Great Lakes Pastoral Conference. The quotations of Luther which he included in the main portion of his address were gleaned from a Victor Book entitled *The Martin Luther Treasury* (Part 4), whose contents were abridged from *Luther's Works*, Volumes 42, 43 and 51 (Fortress Press 1974) – Ed.]

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

As a result of his stand for the Gospel of His Savior, Dr. Martin Luther had to contend with every sort of slanderous attack and physical threat, as well as the condemnation of emperor and pope. He also suffered from a litany of health problems, including what Churchill called the "black dog"—clinical depression.

Of course, there was no physician's diagnosis possible for Luther, and no prescriptions were forthcoming. Yet that did not mean that he was defenseless when discouragement, despair or depression came calling. We have all heard how his wife Katrina could be a true helpmeet at such times. But above all, Luther knew how to use the Word of God to combat the threat to physical, spiritual and mental health, which every form of depression and discouragement brings.

As pastors we are all too familiar with discouragement and dejection. Even if we are spared the deeper darkness of clinical depression, that doesn't make feelings of hopelessness or futility pleasant or easy to handle.

As Lutheran pastors we do well to listen to Dr. Martin. His prescriptions for such afflictions place us under the care of the great Physician, as time and again Luther urges us to apply the healing balm of the Gospel when our hearts grow worn and weary. For example, Luther notes that looking to our own resources in times of hardship, affliction or persecution is a losing proposition. Instead he points to Romans 8:32 and remarks that *"it is true that God gave up His own Son for us all. And if that be true, why do we falter, or worry, or hang our heads? If God gave up His Son for us all, how could He ever intend to forsake us in less important things?"*

Notice how Luther sees in this Scripture a window into the very heart of God – and that there the shadow of Christ's cross falls across every divine intention where we humans are concerned. God's plan of salvation from eternity is simply incompatible with any intention of abandoning us. No one lays down such a price (His own Son!) for something he intends to discard.

Luther also directs us to the counsel and aid of the Holy Spirit when he says: *"We possess God's many encouraging promises and rich assurances. In fact the entire Psalter, all the gospels – yes, all Scripture is filled with them and they are by no means to be scorned, but should be highly valued, such as Psalm 55:22: 'Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.' And Psalm 27:14: 'Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.' Furthermore Christ Himself says in John 16:33, '...take heart! I*

have overcome the world.’ This cannot be wrong – I’m sure of it – Christ, the Son of God, has overcome the world. So...why do we tremble before the world as before a triumphant conqueror?”

In another place Luther remarks: *“Even though we worry and fret so much, such needless anxiety will avail us nothing. We only plague and trouble ourselves and make matters all the worse. God wants us to look to Him as our God and Father in Christ, to call upon Him in every time of need and to be confident that He will provide for us, as St. Peter says, quoting Psalm 55:22: ‘Cast all your anxieties on Him for He cares about you’ (1 Peter 5:7). And as Christ Himself says, ‘You should not be anxious’” (Matt. 6:31).*

Luther realizes – just as our Lord did – that telling us not to be anxious is not enough. We need treatment, powerful healing for the heart. Luther finds it in a single Latin word, the one he scrawled on the very wall when under attack by the ‘black dog.” VIVIT! He lives! Luther says: *“Christ, our dear Lord and Savior, died once for our sin, as it is written in Romans 4:25 and 6:10, Hebrews 5:3 and 9:28. Henceforth He will not die again for the sake of righteousness and truth, but rules as all-powerful Lord over every creature. If this be true, as Scripture continually testifies, what are we afraid of?”*

Certainly, the Reformer notes that we ought to not fear that the living Christ cannot defend and maintain His rule in human hearts: *“Therefore, the only thing necessary for us to do is to believe and to pray most confidently in Christ’s name that God will give us strength, since He has erected His kingdom and this is His doing. It is He, who without our help, counsel, thought or effort has brought His kingdom forth and has advanced and preserved it to this day. I have no doubt that He will consummate it without our advice or assistance.”*

Luther also bids us take our stand on what we by faith know to be so. The doubts of discouragement and depression cannot change these eternal truths: *“Because I know ‘in whom I believe’ as St. Paul says (2 Tim. 1:12), I am certain He will grant me more, do far more abundantly, and help and counsel us beyond all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). He is called the Lord who can and will help in a wonderful, glorious, and mighty way, particularly when the need is the greatest. We are meant to be human beings, not divine. So let us take comfort in His Word and, trusting His promise, call upon Him confidently for deliverance in time of distress. He will help. That is all there is to it; we have no alternative; otherwise unrest would be our reward. May God save us from that, for the sake of His dear Son, our Savior and High Priest, Jesus Christ.” Amen.*

Prayer (from two of Luther’s Prayers in the book of that name)

Almighty and everlasting God, we pray in the name of Your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, first for the spiritual kingdom and the blessed Gospel ministry. Make us devout and faithful preachers who will bring forth the treasure of Your divine word in its truth and purity. Graciously guard us against schisms and heresies.

Through Your word and Holy Spirit grant us a firm, happy, and grateful faith whereby we may readily overcome every trial and discouragement, and at length realize that it is the truth when Your dear Son Jesus Christ Himself says: *“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

Look not upon our great ingratitude with which we have long ago deserved that You should withdraw Your word from us. Do not chastise us as severely as we have merited. Rather let other calamities befall us than deprive us of Your precious word.

We pray that You would give us thankful hearts that we may love Your holy word, prize it very highly, hear it with reverence, and improve our lives accordingly, so that we may not only rightly understand Your word, but also meet its requirements by our deeds, live in accordance with it, and daily increase in faith and good works, that thereby Your name may be hallowed, Your kingdom come, and Your will be done. Amen.

An Overview of the Origin of Satan

David Reim

Many in our day do not believe that there is a real devil. To most the devil is just a remnant of a superstitious past. In most people's minds the devil is more the object of jokes and sayings than a reality. They do not take any discussion of the devil very seriously, which is right where Satan wants people to be.

On the other hand, many believers, who know the devil is very real, may consider the title of this article with a fearful concern and wonder, "Why do we want to spend so much time talking about the devil?" It seems too scary to think about any further.

There are, no doubt, many more who are somewhere in between. They're not sure whether the devil is real or not, and they would just as soon not find out. To them ignorance is bliss.

If we did not need to know about the devil and his ways, then God would not have revealed to us so much information about him in His Word. Everything God has revealed in the Bible is given for our understanding and ultimately for our eternal salvation. Therefore this study of what God tells us about Satan is presented with the prayer that the reader will benefit from it in the following ways:

- That we know for sure that the devil is very real and a very serious threat to mankind.
- That we understand how he works and are better able to recognize his threats.
- That we gain a greater confidence in our victory over the devil in Christ.
- That we give all glory to God who rules all things with His power.

The history of the devil is really the story about the ALL-encompassing power of God and His victory over all evil. We find our perfect protection in our Lord Almighty.

Part I - The Origin of Satan

God does not tell us anything about Satan's origin in His book of origins, Genesis. He is not even called by name there. He suddenly appears as the tempter of mankind. We see his role in bringing the origin of sin into the world, but at this point God does not tell us about the origin of Satan himself. Therefore we need to piece together the information given in other parts of Scripture to understand more about Satan's origin.

Although there should be no doubt that the talking serpent in the Garden of Eden was the Devil or Satan, it is not until the last book of the Bible that we have an explicit identification. In Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 we have reference to "the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan." Both passages tell us that the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve in times of old is none other than the Devil and Satan. These passages also reveal that Satan is not only a cunning serpent (ὁ ὄφις) who seeks to deceive; he is also a fierce and powerful dragon (ὁ δράκων) who comes to destroy.

On the basis of modern translations one might think that the devil was first revealed (and only revealed) as a fierce dragon in the book of Revelation. Is that really the case? Consider Isaiah 27:1: "In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea" (NKJ). We note in particular the Hebrew word **לִיָּאָן** in this verse, translated as "reptile" in the New King James quotation above, "dragon" in the King James Version and **δράκων** in the LXX. The Gesenius-Tregelles lexicon gives the following glosses for this Hebrew word: *a sea monster, a vast fish* (Gen. 1:21, Job 7:12, Is. 27:1); *a serpent* (Ex. 7:9, Deut. 32:33, Ps. 91:13); *a dragon* (Jer. 51:34); *a crocodile* (Ezek. 29:3, Isa. 51:9). Isaiah 27:1 not only equates **לִיָּאָן** with the Leviathan (**לִיָּאָן**), but also seems to imply that the great dragon or monster was at work, seeking to destroy and deserving God's judgment, already in the times of the Old Testament.

God describes both the Pharaoh of Egypt and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the two great enemies and oppressors of God's Old Testament people, as though they were dragons or sea monsters (see Jer. 51:34 and Ezek. 29:3). When we realize that God calls the devil the great dragon, more meaning is expressed by the use of these images. Not only did Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh devour the people of God like a great monster; they were doing so in a way similar to what the devil himself would do. Satan surely is the Dragon who works through the powers of the world in his attempt to devour the people of God (Cf. Rev. 13:2-4 and 16:13).

In connection with this same imagery we note a few other Old Testament passages in which God is portrayed as conquering the dragon. Though these seem to refer to God's dealings with world powers, can we not also recognize in them God's greater triumph over the devil? Compare in particular Isaiah 27:1 (previously cited), Isaiah 51:9 and Psalm 74:13-14.¹

Ever since the fall into sin, serpents and dragons have been regarded as dangerous, deadly animals. What a fitting description of Satan, the one who became the most dangerous and deadly in all of God's creation.

Knowing that the devil is the dragon and serpent of old, we are still left wondering more about the nature of his identity and the history of his origins. He was there in the beginning – there to tempt Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Where and how did he originate?

Satan was a Created Angel

Several passages reveal Satan's origin as a good angel. Revelation 12 says that at one time Satan inhabited heaven, but then was cast out. It speaks of how "**his angels** were cast out with him" (vs. 9). Satan is described in Revelation 9:1-11 as a "**star** fallen from heaven to earth" (vs. 1). Elsewhere in Revelation he is called "the **angel** of the bottomless pit," who rules over the great swarm of terrifying locusts.

The fact that Satan is a fallen angel, who has many other fallen angels to follow him and do his bidding, is clearly established from these passages and others. In Revelation 12:4 Satan is described as the dragon who with "his tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth." Since Satan himself is called a "star" in chapter 9, this could therefore refer to the number of angels whom Satan gathered with him. If so, approximately one third of the created angels joined Satan in his battle against God. That would amount to a vast number of devils or evil angels, who are out there doing their devilish work. Such an observation harmonizes well with the account of the one possessed by a legion of demons, all of whom Jesus cast out of the man and permitted to go into a large herd of swine nearby (Mark 5:1-20).

Two other passages confirm for us that the devils were once good angels who sinned. In Jude 6 we read: "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day." This Word of God is similar to 2 Peter 2:4: "... God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment"

How Satan Fell

The questions still remain. How and why did they fall? What was the nature of their sin? Was there someone or something that tempted them to sin?

God reveals that all angels were created by Him. We read in Nehemiah 9:6: "You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host." Also the Apostle Paul tells us: "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16). When we remember that the Bible refers to the angels as the "host" of heaven,² the angels are certainly to be included in the creation account given as a summary in Genesis 2:1: "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them,

were finished.” The preceding verse then also applies to all the angels whom God had made: “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

It is important that we understand these truths clearly so that we do not think that God in any way was the originator of evil. God is all good and only good and has no evil in Him. His original creation was the perfect reflection and perfect result of His goodness. Evil had its source outside of God and apart from God. God’s involvement with anything evil was only to be that of controlling it according to His will, ultimately triumphing over it and saving man from it.

So where did evil originate? How or why would an angel, who was indeed “very good,” sin and rebel against God? We know that Adam and Eve brought sin into the physical realm of the universe when they were tempted by Satan and subsequently chose to disobey God. Can we identify some influence that moved Satan and his angels to rebel?

Two Old Testament References

Two chapters in the Old Testament serve us well in providing greater insight into the fall of Satan. These are chapters which may have escaped our notice in the past, because the devil is not mentioned by name in the text and many commentaries have made no reference to Satan in their exposition of what the chapters mean. We especially consider within these chapters the proclamation against the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 and the proclamation against the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28.

Isaiah 14

Beginning with verse 3, this chapter contains a proclamation of the Lord against the king of Babylon. God foretold his destruction and end. Interestingly, no specific king is mentioned in this chapter, even though the proclamation is made in the singular (מֶלֶךְ). In verse 12 the prophecy seems to go beyond any human king in Babylon. There we hear of “Lucifer,” the Latin translation of the Hebrew word *helel* (הֵלֵל), which means “brightness” or “Day Star.” It would be interesting to study the use of this term to see how the name “Lucifer” became so widely recognized as a name of Satan.

Many commentators speak of the whole section here as referring only to the human king of Babylon. However, consider the following observations as supporting evidence for understanding these verses to be referring to Satan, who is behind and working through the king of Babylon.

1. As already mentioned, Satan is identified in Revelation as a star fallen from heaven, who also swooped with him many other stars out of heaven. That fits the imagery of this prophecy well.

2. While the imagery used in verses 12ff could be understood as speaking about the pride of the king of Babylon, the lofty ambitions spoken of reach into the heavens – into the very realm of the “Most High” God (v. 14) – and thus seem to describe someone greater than any earthly king.

3. Verses in Daniel 10 and Ephesians 6, along with images in Revelation, seem to indicate that Satan himself is behind the work of human kings who set themselves up as adversaries of God’s people.

4. The kingdom of Babylon is compared to a dragon which devours the people of God (Jer. 51:34) and therefore resembles the association of Satan with the Dragon referred to in Revelation 12.

These observations, when taken together, would help to suggest that Isaiah’s prophecy about the fall of the king of Babylon goes beyond the fall of its human kings; it also describes the fall of Satan himself. A weaving together of prophetic judgment against two different entities is surely nothing new. Even as we recognize God speaking to Satan when He addressed the serpent

in Eden, so it is not difficult to recognize God speaking to Satan here as well in His words against the king of Babylon.

If we agree to understand Isaiah 14 as expressing a proclamation against Satan in connection with the Lord's proclamation against the king of Babylon, we encounter some interesting things about the fall of Satan and the origin of evil. Let's focus especially on verses 12-15: "*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'* Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit." Based on the description here given, it would seem that Satan once enjoyed a very high, exalted position in heaven. He was called "brightness" (or "Day Star") and the "son of the morning." Perhaps Satan occupied a position in heaven above the other stars or angels. If this was truly the case, it apparently wasn't enough for him.

Notice the description introduced in verse 13: "For you have said in your heart." That is followed by five statements using the same introductory words "I will." "**I will** ascend into heaven, **I will** exalt my throne above the stars of God; **I will** also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; **I will** ascend above the heights of the clouds, **I will** be like the Most High." In the NKJ translation here quoted the English future tense "I will" is the chosen way of rendering the five Imperfect 1st singular verb forms in Hebrew.

The plans of Lucifer were to exalt himself. He was not satisfied with a high position of service in God's kingdom. He wanted to ascend into heaven – to the very throne of God – and set up his own throne there. He wanted to be in a position of ruling the "stars," the other angels of God. He wanted to sit enthroned over God's people on the mount of the congregation. He wanted to be above the clouds of glory in heaven. Finally, his real goal is made clear: he wanted to be like God Himself, the Most High. Lucifer wanted to be supreme above all.

Where did his evil ambitions come from? Not from God! Not from some other tempter. They came entirely from within his own heart (v. 13: "you have said **in your heart**"). His own desires for self exaltation led Lucifer to try to exalt himself over God and His angels.

Lucifer seemed to have a partial success in seeking power and glory for himself. He succeeded in bringing a third of the angels under his domain. He succeeded in leading Adam and Eve to obey him rather than God. In so doing he caused the fall of all mankind. Even after God's work of salvation is carried out by Christ and people are converted to the Christian faith, Satan still retains control over a large majority of mankind as the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

However, in this prophecy we also have the good news that Lucifer has been defeated and has fallen. He has fallen from heaven, even as Jesus declared in Luke 10:18 to the 70 who returned with joy, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Isaiah foretold of Lucifer: "you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit." The same is reported in Revelation 20 where the devil is bound "for a thousand years and cast into the bottomless pit" (vv. 2-3).

Ezekiel 28

Within this chapter of Ezekiel we find similar descriptions, which provide even more insight into the origin of Satan. They are to be found in verses 11 and following. Ezekiel 28, like Isaiah 14, is a proclamation against a human king – in this instance, the king of Tyre. Like the king of Babylon, the king of Tyre wanted to exalt himself above all others. Pride and desire for self-aggrandizement led him to even claim, "I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods, in the midst of the seas" (v. 2). Since his heart was controlled and ruled by Satan, the one who tried to exalt his throne above God, it is not surprising that this human king, like so many others, also tried to exalt

himself to the position of God. God, however, will take His righteous stand and “oppose the proud” (1 Pt. 5:5, Jam. 4:6). Thus the king of Tyre will also be brought down to destruction.

Verses 1-5 are clearly speaking about the human king of Tyre. Even though he claimed to be a god, God regards him otherwise and thereby proves that he is a mere man. We hear the Lord’s reply in verses 9-10: “Will you still say before him who slays you, ‘I am a god’? But you shall be a man, and not a god, in the hand of him who slays you. You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of aliens; for I have spoken,” says the Lord GOD.”

Verse 11, however, begins a new lamentation for the king of Tyre. The indictment against the person here addressed takes the reader to a whole new level. Like the Isaiah 14 prophecy, this passage has been passed over by some commentators with little comment, as if they don’t really know what to say about it. Others attempt to explain it as referring only to the human king of Tyre. Some admit that it seems to refer to someone beyond the human king, but they don’t attempt to identify who or what. A few flatly say that the real focus of this lament is Satan.

The very words of this text have led this writer to the conviction that God is talking to Satan, the greater foe behind the earthly king. Once again, God speaks to Satan when He addresses Satan’s instrument. We recognize in the content of God’s words some things which may apply to the earthly king, some things which may apply to the spiritual king and some which may apply to both, just as in the Garden some of God’s words applied to the serpent itself (“on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life” – Gen. 3:14), while others applied only to Satan (“He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” – v. 15).

Let’s take note especially of those unique descriptions applicable to Satan, as we read the Lord’s proclamation against the king of Tyre in verses 12-19. *Thus says the Lord GOD: “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you. You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you have become a horror, and shall be no more forever.”*

Taken as a reference to Satan (at least in part), the content of these verses gives a remarkable description of Satan before his fall, as well as greater insight into the reason for his fall. Consider the following:

Verse 12b: *“You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.”* The person here addressed was, at least at one time, absolutely perfect. He was the seal or epitome of perfection. He was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. This could never be true of the king of Tyre in a literal sense. The only way such qualities could be said of the man would have to be as an expression of pure sarcasm or great exaggeration. At one time, however, the quality of perfection was certainly true of Satan, who was created as a holy angel. He originally was Lucifer, the “brightness” or “day star.” Was he, perhaps, the most beautiful of all the angels?

Verse 13: *“You were in Eden, the garden of God.”* This clause makes a more direct identification. The garden of God was long gone when the king of Tyre was born, but the one

who stood behind the king of Tyre and moved him in his prideful, wicked ways was definitely there in Eden. He might well have been in the garden from the start, as the rest of the passage seems to suggest. He was certainly there when he carried out his devilish plan to lead men away from God and take them down the path of sin and rebellion.

It is difficult to determine what to make of the rest of this verse. It could simply indicate that Lucifer had everything he could rightfully want or desire. Some see in the precious stones mentioned an imagery comparable to the breastplate worn by the high priest and suggest a figurative parallel to Lucifer, who had a high position in charge of the worship and praise given by the angels. However, the priest had twelve gem stones on his breastplate. Here only nine are mentioned and not all of them match the twelve of the breastplate. It seems safer to say that the precious stones indicate the original beauty and splendor given to Lucifer.³ All these precious gems were prepared “for [him] on the day [he] was created.” They were his “covering.”

Verse 14 gives us another reason to recognize a description here given of Satan before his fall. He is called “*the anointed cherub who covers*” – an identification also made in verse 16, where he is called the “covering cherub.” Consideration of all the biblical references made to a cherub or the plural cherubim reveals that the word in either grammatical form is used primarily of one who is an angel.⁴

Cherubim angels were used by God to guard the way to the Garden of Eden after the fall – an interesting detail to consider, if Satan was once a cherub. Images of cherubim angels were used extensively in the artwork of the Temple. The Ark of the Covenant had two cherubim on the cover, shadowing the mercy seat with their wings. The Holy of Holies had two large cherubim angels, whose wings spanned the entire room. The large veil and all the walls and pillars were decorated with cherubim. God is often referred to as the one who sits or dwells “between the cherubim” (Ps. 80:1, Ps. 99:1, Is. 37:16). Cherubim seem to be the closest to God and are connected to the praise and worship of God.

What is meant by the cherub “who covers” and the “covering cherub” is uncertain. The only other references to the covering of cherubim are made in connection with the cherubim images which covered the mercy seat with their wings. It would seem, however, that God had specifically “anointed” Lucifer for such a position. God “established” him for it. Lucifer, the bright “day star” of Isaiah 14, was chosen and set apart by God to some high position above the other angels.

“*You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.*” The holiness of God is often pictured as fiery splendor, which lends additional support to the idea that Lucifer enjoyed a high position in the presence of God.

Verse 15: Once again God proclaims: “*You were perfect in your ways.*” Here we have another reference made to the condition of being perfect: the anointed cherub was sinless or blameless “from the day [he was] created.” The same Hebrew word here (מִיָּמֵינוּ), translated as *faultless* (LXX), *perfect* (NKJ) or *blameless* (NIV), is used of certain believers like Noah and Job. Would God speak in such a way about a heathen king?

Lucifer was created to be perfect and holy. He was one of the most beautiful creatures God had made, the “Day Star” shining brighter than all the other angelic stars. He had great wisdom. He was chosen by God and set apart for a high position in the presence of God above the other angels. There was not another created being that enjoyed more of the blessings and goodness of God. Yet his remarkable status came to a sudden end. “*You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.*” From where did his fallen state come? Not outside of him. There was no unrighteousness outside of him to be found within a creature that could tempt him. No iniquity was to be found anywhere in heaven or in all of creation. It came from within him: “iniquity was found **IN YOU.**”

Verse 16 sounds like it might apply more to the king of Tyre. The first part of the verse declares that he was known for “the abundance of [his] trading.” How that description could apply to Satan is uncertain. Yet we observe the statement that the person addressed in verse 16 was one “filled with violence *within*,” who “*sinned*” and lost his God-given status. When Lucifer sinned, God cast “*the covering cherub*” out from His presence as a “*profane thing*” and destroyed him. As one who followed in the ways of Satan, the king of Tyre would receive a similar judgment.

Verse 17: God gives even more insight into the nature of Satan's fall. *‘Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.’* Proverbs 16:18 tells us that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” In the history of Satan we see how true that is. Lucifer was so overcome with his own beauty and wisdom that he began to think more highly of himself instead of giving more praise to his Creator. He became infatuated by his own splendor. He wanted more glory and power for himself and tried to exalt himself above all.

As a result of his rebellion and his attempt to usurp the throne of God, the Lord “cast [him] as a profane thing out of the mountain of God” and “destroyed” him. The judgment carried out was not annihilation. God destroyed him in relation to his beauty and position in heaven. God destroyed “the covering cherub *from* the midst of the fiery stones.” That anointed cherub went from being only good and the mark of perfection and beauty to being only evil, never again to have one good thought or to do one good deed, not one.

One significant question remains about the origin of Satan. The Bible talks about a battle waged in heaven and the outcome of Satan, with all the angels who followed him, being cast out of heaven. When did that take place?

Some passages, like these verses in Ezekiel 28, seem to suggest that he was cast out in the beginning, right after the fall into sin. On the other hand, the book of Job talks about Satan coming before God, as the other angels did.⁵ In Zechariah 3:1-2 Satan is portrayed as standing beside Joshua the high priest, accusing him before the Angel of the LORD. Jesus said He “saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). We also have the description in Revelation 12 of the battle in heaven, the defeat of the devil and his angels and their being cast out, which seems to be connected more with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus (cf. Rev. 12:5) than with the original fall.⁶

Though we cannot answer the matter definitively, let's remember that the text of Ezekiel 28 contains a prophecy of God's future judgment on the king of Tyre. Would it be acceptable, in consideration of all that Scripture says, to understand the battle in heaven and the fate of Satan in the following way? The battle began in the beginning when Lucifer rebelled. He was judged by God and immediately lost his beauty, splendor and position. Nevertheless, he continued to rage against God and the angels in heaven. He could still come before God to accuse people and thus live up to the name Satan, which means adversary or accuser. He could deceive and work his rebellion among men. But every time that God brought judgment on one of Satan's chief human pawns, like the king of Tyre and the king of Babylon, and every time that God upheld and preserved the faith of one of His chosen children, like Job or David or Joshua the high priest, Satan suffered a defeat. Finally, when Jesus the Son of God came to battle Satan, He won the ultimate victory over Satan and all of his evil activity. Satan was cast out of heaven for good with all his evil angels. He was bound and cast into the bottomless pit, reserved for eternal judgment in the lake of fire that burns forever.

Important Lessons to Learn from the Origin of Satan

It is very important that we understand the origin of Satan for several reasons.

1) We first need to clearly recognize that God is not the originator of evil. Many want to blame God for the existence of evil. That has been true from the very beginning of sin's intrusion

into the world and the moment Adam wanted to blame God for giving him his wife. We too get caught up in the same mindset at times. But God has never been the cause or originator of any evil. God remains as our only hope in the battle against evil. He has defeated the devil and will finally overturn and destroy all evil forever. Evil came from within Satan himself. Puffed up and enamored with his own glory, Satan became filled with evil. Evil was then brought into this world through the devil's temptation and the willing participation of Adam and Eve. They were not forced to sin. They had the ability not to sin. But they made a choice to listen to Satan rather than to God, and so they brought sin, death and every other evil into this world.

Why did God create the angels and man with a will that was capable of choosing to sin? We should not go there. That question has led many to try once again to place the ultimate blame on God. God never felt the need to explain His reasons to us, nor is He obligated to justify his actions in our eyes. There is no unrighteousness in Him. He doesn't do anything that is wrong or unfair or unloving. Many have suggested that God did not want robots which mindlessly do His will. They assert that the angels and Adam and Eve, on the basis of their created free will, could show their willing obedience and faithful devotion to their Creator. That might well have been true, but God has not told us His reasons. Nor has He ever been required to do so.

2) What we are allowed to see is a glorious rescue taking place in response to the fall. As a result of the fall into sin, we gain a greater sense of the depth of God's amazing love and grace. If there never had been a fall, we never would have seen the full extent of God's overwhelming love, commitment and willingness to sacrifice His own Son in the place of the people He had made. Yes, it was the people whom God sought to redeem – not the animals, not the angels. In addition, God has demonstrated Himself to be the only One with the power and the holiness to destroy evil. Therefore God's holiness, power, love, mercy and grace become more visible to us as we watch Him respond in Christ to the rebellion of the world.

3) Finally, understanding the origin of Satan is an enormous help in recognizing the workings and temptations of Satan going on in the world today. Satan works through the same thing that brought about his own fall; he seeks our downfall by stirring up or appealing to PRIDE. Satan enticed Adam and Eve to seek greater glory for themselves rather than to give glory to God. He appealed to their pride by suggesting that "you will be like God, knowing good and evil." They fell for it, and ever since that dreadful moment man has wanted to seek his own glory above God's glory. Satan used the same motivation when he enlisted the kings of Tyre and Babylon. He led them to be filled with their own greatness and to put themselves above God and His Word; he even induced them to actually think that they were a god. Satan continues to do the same today. As created beings that are "fearfully and wonderfully made," God has given mankind a greater intelligence, will and status than any other earthly creature. But instead of praising God for such great gifts and using those gifts to glorify Him for all that He is, man boasts in his own greatness, as if he had something to do with it.

Remember God's Word through the Apostle Paul: "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7) Whatever we are, whatever we have – our beauty, our wisdom, our talent – everything has been given to us by God. Therefore let us not follow the ways of the devil and think highly of ourselves or try to raise ourselves above others, as if we deserve some credit for what we are. Rather let us praise and glorify God always for all His goodness and mercy. May we humbly use His blessings for His glory and for the benefit of His creation.

Let this be a special warning to pastors. God has given us a very high and honorable position in the work of His kingdom. He has chosen us to be shepherds over His flock. May we not pride ourselves in that position, but glorify God and humbly serve Him and the people He has placed in our care. God warns pastors especially in 1 Timothy 3: "A bishop then must be

blameless, ... not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil” (vv. 2, 6).

John Milton once said that Satan was “preferring to be the king of hell, rather than the servant of heaven.”⁷ That may be, but I do not think Lucifer had thought about or imagined what the result of his prideful usurping of power would be. He did not choose to be the king of hell instead of the servant of heaven. He wanted to be the king of heaven. He failed in his attempt, and as a consequence of his rebellion he became the king of hell, who would suffer forever in the lake of fire. He wanted everything for himself; he ended up with nothing but torment under God’s wrath and punishment. He learned the hard way that no one can overcome God.

Let this be a strong warning to us too, whenever we are tempted with the sin of pride and self-seeking. There is no greater honor than to be a humble servant of God and to fulfill the purpose for which He has created us. May we come to see and enjoy all the glory, power, grace and love of God and joyfully give praise to Him forever. By His grace in Christ we will then be elevated to a higher glory in God’s heavenly presence than we ever could have imagined.

Endnotes

¹ Isaiah 51:9: “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart, and wounded the serpent (תַּנִּינִי)?”

Psalm 74:13: “You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents (pl. form of תַּנִּינִי) in the waters. You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.”

² Cf. Luke 2:13-15 in which the “multitude of the heavenly host” (πλῆθος στρατιᾶς οὐρανόυ) are clearly equated with angels.

³ Note the similarity of these stones with those listed in the portrayal of the glory of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21.

⁴ BibleWorks 4.0 has a listing of 30 occurrences of the singular form “cherub” and 66 occurrences of the plural “cherubim.” In Ezra 2:59 and Nehemiah 7:61 mention is made of a man named Cherub, who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity.

⁵ Job 1:6: “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.” Also Job 2:1: “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, *and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD.*”

⁶ Cf. Revelation 12:10: “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.” And Jesus’ words in John 12:31-32: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

⁷ The quotation of Milton was taken from the essay, “The Fall of Satan” by John F. MacArthur, Jr.

(To be continued)

MINISTERING TO THE CLINICALLY DEPRESSED

Paul D. Nolting

“We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.”

- 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

Could it possibly be that the apostle Paul was here speaking of enduring a time of depression himself during his third missionary journey? While we can not be certain of that, we can say that Paul’s words certainly express the very real feelings which many depressed people do experience. What we must note is that an estimated 25% of all Americans will experience some form of clinical depression at some point in their lives.¹ What we must realize is that clinical depression is widespread also within the Christian community, frequently misunderstood by members and often neglected by pastors, for it can easily remain “under the radar” or be “placed on the back burner” for any number of reasons. In this article we will consider the nature of clinical depression, the causes of clinical depression, the symptoms of clinical depression, the treatment of clinical depression, and finally certain resources available to help us understand and assist our members in dealing with clinical depression. May the Lord bless our study and understanding of this important area of our pastoral ministry!

The Nature of Clinical Depression

Everyone experiences the “blues” once in a while. They are a natural part of life in this sinful world. It would appear that even Jesus may have suffered from the “blues,” as He with sadness commented, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing”* (Matt. 23:37). Problems arise within our lives and produce an assortment of stresses and strains. The Psalmist David wrote, *“The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple”* (18:4-6). The “blues,” however, pass relatively quickly, and individuals are able to continue functioning on a normal basis. Clinical depression is very different. When people are clinically depressed, they are not able to function on a normal basis. Their depression does not go away; it rather remains and causes them to go into a downward spiritual, emotional, mental and physical spiral, which can have many serious consequences for themselves and those around them.

Clinical depression is “a complicated set of emotional and physiological responses – a feeling of gloom or sadness that is usually accompanied by a slowing down of the body. It is not just in the mind but is experienced throughout the whole body.”² Tests reveal that the brain of an individual who is clinically depressed responds at a slower rate than normal. The neuro-chemical processes simply do not work as they usually do. Individuals suffering from clinical depression frequently describe their lives with depression as living in a dark room with the shades drawn, and they describe their recovering from clinical depression as a step out of that dark room into the sunshine of life once again. People who overcome depression report that colors appear to be brighter and food tastes so much better.³ One woman with whom I recently visited described her situation while suffering from depression as feeling as though she were living in a shell with no hope of ever coming out.

Clinical depression can affect people of all ages and all racial, social, economic, educational and religious backgrounds. While one might assume that depression is an “adult” issue, studies show that 5% of children between the ages of six and twelve and as many as 10% of teenagers experience major depression.⁴ Within the adult population women tend to experience depression more often than men, although depression within the male population increases with

age and goes undiagnosed and untreated more often than it does among women.⁵ In addition, it is now estimated that up to 35% of older people, especially if they suffer from one or more medical conditions, also suffer from clinical depression. This is especially true for those older people who are residents of nursing homes.⁶

The Causes of Clinical Depression

[The material presented in this section is a composite of information found in Daniel Loe's *Understanding Clinical Depression*, James Jefferson and John Greist's *Depression and Older People* and the Channing L. Bete Company's *Hope and Help for Depression*.]

Unresolved spiritual problems can and often do cause clinical depression. Impenitence or a lack of genuine repentance can cause severe depression. Consider the words of King David in Psalm 32, which describe his spiritual condition after he committed the sins of adultery and murder and before he confessed those sins to the prophet Nathan: *'When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer'* (verses 3-4). David here describes not the passing "blues," but a state of mind which developed over and lasted many months! Individuals can also experience depression because of the unnecessary guilt associated with past sins, for which they have already repented, or because of false guilt and misplaced feelings of responsibility for sins and situations which are not their responsibility. Years ago, an elderly man close to death appeared restless and depressed for weeks until he privately confessed to his pastor that as an eighteen year old man he had traveled to a big city and visited a prostitute. He had confessed that sin privately to God many times. It had certainly been washed away by the blood of his Savior. Yet it was only when he was assured verbally of his forgiveness at that late date in his life that his spirits brightened; he could finally embrace with confidence the gospel's promise of everlasting life. Consider another example of a woman who struggled with depression for years – a depression brought on over a long period of time by the troubles, sins and failures of her adult children. She felt that if only somehow she had done a better job as a mother, her children would not have made so many bad decisions. It was only after a therapist pointed out that her children's decisions were beyond her control and "not her fault" that she found relief from her depressed state and, interestingly enough, the courage and ability to quietly provide solid biblical counsel for her children.

Clinical depression is often brought on by the stress and strain of outward events: loss of a loved one, financial difficulties, physical or mental illness, operations, verbal or sexual abuse, loss of a job, children leaving home, divorce and family break-up. When dealing with individuals affected by such events, we must remember that these situations often affect more than one individual within any given relationship. Operations, for example, can affect not only those who undergo them, but also the family members who must provide follow-up care. Divorces affect not only the couple involved, but their immediate and extended families and especially their children.

Unresolved emotional struggles and internal personal conflicts can bring on depression. Individuals struggling with a poor self-image, feelings of shame, loneliness, or involved in a pattern of degrading self-talk often fall into depression. Individuals who are relentlessly self-motivated and driven to perfectionism will often suffer depression when their personal goals become unachievable.

There are various other factors which contribute to the occurrence of clinical depression. Researchers have learned that depression, especially certain types of depression, tends to run in families – an observation which suggests a genetic link. Researchers also believe that depression is tied directly to imbalances of certain chemicals called neurotransmitters within the brain. Hormonal changes within women may play a role in postpartum depression and cause problems at the time of menopause. Depression can result from other medical problems, such as a thyroid condition, cancer, heart disease, hypoglycemia, mononucleosis, stroke, Parkinson's disease or

vitamin deficiencies. It can occur along with other psychiatric conditions, such as anxiety disorders. The misuse of alcohol and other drugs often leads to depression. Depression can be a side effect of using certain medications, especially those used to treat high blood pressure, and also a side effect of using tranquilizers, sedatives or sleeping pills.

Frequently, the cause of clinical depression is multi-faceted and so difficult to diagnose. We pastors will want to listen carefully to our members as they share their thoughts, concerns and circumstances with us and be sensitive to the many possible causes of a member's depression. We cannot provide the appropriate biblical counsel for those things of which we are unaware. We will not know when to make necessary referrals, if we are unaware of the involvement of a variety of contributing factors.

The Symptoms of Clinical Depression

What are the symptoms of clinical depression? How can we tell if we or someone else is suffering from clinical depression? The following is a simple test established by health-care providers:⁷

If a person has depression, that person will experience at least one of the following symptoms on a daily basis for at least two weeks:

- a deep sense of sadness or unhappiness;
- a lack of interest in things one used to enjoy, such as hobbies, friends or sex.

That same person will generally experience at least four of the following symptoms:⁸

- change in appetite;
- weight gain or loss;
- trouble remembering, thinking or making decisions;
- fatigue or lack of energy;
- sleeping too much or too little;
- feelings of guilt, worthlessness or hopelessness;
- feelings of uneasiness or worry;
- restlessness or decreased activity;
- headaches;
- stomach aches;
- sexual problems;
- thoughts of death or suicide; attempted suicide.

The Treatment of the Clinically Depressed

The material presented above, particularly within the section on "Causes of Clinical Depression," could easily leave Christian pastors questioning their ability to minister to the clinically depressed. Many of the causes of clinical depression appear to involve areas outside the expertise of Christian pastors and may at times seem unrelated to biblical counseling. However, Christian pastors should not hesitate to address the problem of clinical depression when it affects their members, for in many ways pastors are uniquely qualified to and indeed can provide essential elements of the treatment of the clinically depressed member. Christian pastors do not share with depressed individuals just their personal opinions and advice or the result of the latest research. As a far greater service to their members, they bring them absolute truths from a completely reliable source, the inspired Word of God (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17). They lead their members to the power of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within them and works through the Word and the sacraments to strengthen their faith and increase those godly virtues necessary for them to return to a productive Christian life (cf. Galatians 5:22-25). Christian pastors can help their members deal effectively with the past sins and situations which have brought on depression, for they can assure their members of God's forgiveness and His providential care (cf. 1 John 1:9; Romans 8:28; Philippians 3:13-14 and 4:6-7). Christian pastors provide a unique and essential

approach to their members' needs, for they base their counsel upon the grace and love of God, the assurance of which is most needed by those who are depressed (cf. 1 John 3:20 and 4:10, 19). Christian pastors can also proceed with confidence, for they know that the truths of Scripture are universal and so apply to all people. Jesus offers rest to all people (cf. Matthew 11:28), hope to all people (cf. John 6:37), love to all people (cf. John 3:16) and life to all people (cf. John 4:14). Finally, while medical doctors are called upon to address the physical and psychological needs of their patients, Christian pastors are able to address the critical spiritual needs of their members, thus serving the needs of the whole person.⁹ Christian pastors should not hesitate to minister to members afflicted with depression. They can do so with the certain conviction that the truth they have to share is vital to the overall health and welfare of those members and will be used by the Spirit of God in accordance with His will both to help and to heal (cf. Isaiah 55:11).

How then should we as Christian pastors proceed in ministering to those who are clinically depressed? The first and foremost thing that we must provide is preventive, spiritual medicine! We need to thoroughly instruct our young members in the principles of both law and gospel in Sunday school and confirmation class. We need to proclaim those principles, with a healthy emphasis on the gospel, in our Sunday sermons. A member at Immanuel, who has struggled with clinical depression for many decades, mentioned to me how much she appreciated the instruction she received from her pastor during her confirmation years, for it was his instruction concerning the grave consequences of committing suicide that kept her from taking her life on more than one occasion. It was also his instruction in the precious truths of the gospel which led her to seek out, in the midst of her depressed state, a church where the gospel was proclaimed and emphasized in each and every Sunday sermon.

Ministering to those who are clinically depressed involves a diligence of time, care and compassion. It takes time to listen and listen we must, because there can be so many facets to the problem. Spiritual issues may well be tied to physical concerns, which in turn are complicated by psychological problems or physiological imbalances. Just being there and listening attentively to members suffering from depression, as they share their thoughts and feelings, will go a long way towards creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence, which is so essential to our counseling efforts. The ministering we do also requires great care, for unlike a physician who sends a patient to the pharmacy and prescribes taking two pills each morning, pastors cannot simply prescribe "two chapters a day" and have their members check back next week! Thinking patterns become altered during the course of clinical depression. Those who are depressed, when reading their Bibles, frequently do not believe that gospel promises apply to them. They focus on the law, frequently dwelling on past sins and condemning themselves for their weakness of faith. Ministering to the clinically depressed will certainly entail great compassion, for it is so easy to victimize those who are already depressed.¹⁰ While the law must be administered where impenitence is the root of a member's depression, pastors in general will want to apply the healing balm of the gospel in generous and consistent doses! Individuals with clinical depression will tend to think less of themselves, as they compare themselves, for instance, to the heroes of faith. Should they be asked, "Where is your faith?" they can easily begin to doubt that they even have saving faith. Should it be suggested that "true" Christians either do not suffer from depression or should be able to overcome these issues on their own and do so relatively easily, they can quickly be convinced that even God is against them. Consequently, pastors will want to pick with great care those sections of Scripture which they suggest for reading. They will want to find devotionals which emphasize God's grace and love.¹¹ They will want to visit their member regularly, discuss directly the situations and circumstances at the root of the person's depression and prepare gospel-centered devotions addressed specifically to the issues which their member is facing. Never assume that you are being too obvious. Make the effort to connect the dots leading from the principles you share from the Scriptures to the applications your members are to make in their lives.

Individuals suffering from clinical depression frequently find themselves focused primarily on themselves, the regrets of their past and their fears of the future. The solution ultimately lies in pointing the eyes of the depressed individual away from himself and up to his God, while helping that individual to keep focused on the present, not on the past or the future. Fortunately, many of the very Bible passages which our confirmands memorize and are typically familiar to Christians will help in this area. *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”* (Psalm 23:1). *“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”* (Psalm 27:1) *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1). *“I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD who made heaven and earth”* (Psalm 121:1). *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand”* (Isaiah 41:10). *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all the things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”* (Matthew 6:31-34). *“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20). *“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

In a recent counseling session a member suffering from clinical depression rehearsed for me a whole series of past sins and failures, expressing uncertainty about the reality of God’s forgiveness, despair in his own weakness and fear regarding his own future and that of his family. After I assured him of God’s forgiveness and pointed to numerous passages in which God assured him of His love, he continued to protest that he was unworthy to turn to God, because “all his righteousnesses were as filthy rags” (spoken in reference to Isaiah 64:6). While his remark illustrated the tendency of depressed people to focus on the law rather than the gospel, it also revealed a misunderstanding of Scripture’s intended meaning. I reminded him that the words of Isaiah 64:6 were written with reference to those individuals who were suggesting that their good works were of sufficient merit that they did not need the promised Christ. On the contrary, when speaking of those who place their faith in Christ, the Scripture says that God will *“bring forth [their] righteousness as the light”* (Psalm 37:6) and, in fact, Jesus declares believers to be *“the light of the world”* (Matthew 5:14). I went on to point out that God comes to us as we are, lost in sin, and redeems us in spite of our sin – *“Christ died for the ungodly.... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:6, 8). I encouraged him to see himself as God sees him – an individual created by God (cf. Psalm 139:13-14); an individual redeemed by the blood of Christ (cf. Romans 3:23-25); an individual indwelt and sanctified by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Thessalonians 2:13); an individual protected and preserved in this life by our powerful God (cf. John 10:29); an individual to whom God entrusted the gifts of a wife and children (cf. Psalm 128:3-4); and an individual destined to spend eternity in heaven (cf. John 14:2-3). These are truths of great comfort to which we will have to return time and time again as we counsel those who suffer from clinical depression.

Clinical depression is an illness, the recovery from which may require medical as well as spiritual help. It is important that we as pastors understand this fact. Just as we might encourage our members to seek medical advice and treatment for a mere physical ailment, we should not be afraid to refer them, when necessary, to their doctors for help with clinical depression. Proper diet, sufficient sleep and exercise, and possibly the use of medications will be critical elements of any successful treatment. It is, therefore, helpful if a pastor can locate a doctor or counselor who is sensitive to our biblical approach and concerns and to whom individuals can be referred upon

occasion. In some areas of the country there are Christian counselors who want to work with pastors and at times are willing to have them sit in on their counseling sessions, recognizing that pastors have a call to serve the spiritual needs of their members. In view of new privacy laws pastors will want to encourage their members to sign release forms, so that doctors and counselors have legal permission to share information with them.¹² While there is good reason for us to be skeptical of many aspects of secular psychiatry and wary of any spiritual counseling based on false theology, we should also realize that in certain cases psychiatric help will be necessary and, fortunately, there are a growing number of Christian counselors who are sensitive to many of our concerns.

It is also important that our members who suffer from depression realize that clinical depression is an illness, for which they may need to seek professional help. One gentleman, who has suffered greatly from clinical depression over the years and for whom medications have in recent years provided a profound relief, indicated that while he was in seminary years ago, his professors simply condemned all forms of psychiatry. When he approached one of his professors to discuss his own feelings of depression, he was told, "If the Bible isn't good enough, nothing is good enough!" Consequently, this gentleman avoided any medical help for decades and throughout that period experienced severe guilt. He assumed that his feelings of depression were simply an indication of weak faith and that if only he could be stronger in his faith, the feelings would go away. He confessed that at times he felt he was near blasphemy, for in his thoughts he would blame God for his continued state of near despair in spite of fervent prayers for help. Now, however, he is growing stronger spiritually through a regular study of God's Word, while the medications he is taking have helped him to get rid of his dark feelings and maintain a balanced emotional life.

It is likewise important for the families of individuals suffering clinical depression to understand the nature of this illness. If they do not, they will be ill-prepared to help those suffering with this difficulty. A woman who has suffered from clinical depression for many years expressed her deep hurt regarding comments she has received from her husband. Early in her marriage as she struggled with clinical depression, her husband insisted that she did not need medical help, because "true Christians don't lose their minds." At a later time when she insisted upon and received medical help, he continued to insist that she did not need the prescribed medicines, even though they provided her great relief. He insisted that she should be able to pull herself out of those feelings on her own. In order to preserve peace in the family, she has ceased all medications, but has found that she must force herself to do what is necessary to be done. She has accepted her situation and believes that her struggles have drawn her closer to her God, upon whom she knows she must depend. Yet her husband's insensitivity and lack of support in this area have unfortunately placed great stress on their otherwise strong marital relationship.

Families who are well-informed about clinical depression will be in a good position to help their loved ones as they deal with their own illness. We as pastors have a number of suggestions that we may share with family members as they seek to help their loved one. We can encourage them to: pray for and with their loved one; assure their loved one of God's healing love and His forgiveness freely offered in Christ Jesus; share favorite Bible verses or stories with them; involve them in family devotions; encourage them and join them in regular congregational worship; spend time with them and listen attentively to their concerns; offer to go with them to seek out help from their pastor, counselor or doctor; encourage their loved ones to accompany them on walks, errands or shopping trips; and help them with self-care (exercise, diet, etc) on a daily basis.¹³

While we can and should encourage families to help those they love with clinical depression, we should also be very aware of the effects that clinical depression will typically have on others in the family. Children especially can be and are affected by the depression of the adults in their lives and the issues which brought on that depression. A divorce and its ensuing

family break-up, for instance, will certainly affect the children involved in significant ways, possibly leading to depression occurring in them. A wise pastor will visit with all family members in such a situation in order to determine whether or not additional family members are in danger of becoming depressed. In general, when dealing with children and discussing their depression with their parents, it is wise not to do so in front of the parents. Depressed children are still children and often simply want to have things their own way. It is not uncommon for children to use their dark emotional state to manipulate their parents to get what they want from a sympathetic parent.¹⁴ As is so often the case with children in general, a depressed child getting what he wants is not always what is the wisest or the best!

While we frequently think of our ministry to those suffering from clinical depression as being a very private and personal ministry of pastor to parishioner, there are other ways in which we and our congregations can minister to those clinically depressed. First and foremost, through regular reference and application we can address this subject in our Sunday sermons. Individuals who suffer from clinical depression frequently and falsely believe that they are alone in their suffering. It is helpful for them to know that this is a problem endured by a significant number of their fellow believers and to hear that God's Word addresses this issue frequently and plainly. Even though a variety of help goes into the treatment of clinical depression, God's Word remains the most important, powerful and useful agent we have to deal with this illness and thus to address the needs of the whole person. Secondly, the topic of clinical depression can and should be addressed in Bible class or other seminar forums, for in this way detailed information on the illness can be shared, which might not be appropriate for a sermon. Such forums encourage questions and provide opportunities for discussion, which will help clarify the situation and prepare individuals to address it effectively. Thirdly, general information and additional support can be provided to congregational members through a Parish Nurse program. Many such programs involve at a minimum the maintenance of a medical tract rack, which can provide the basic medical information about clinical depression. Congregations blessed with a program staffed by fellow believers who are either doctors or nurses are in a wonderful position to provide their members suffering from clinical depression with knowledgeable individuals with whom to talk – individuals with a solid foundation both in the faith and in medicine. Finally, congregations can form support groups where individuals afflicted by clinical depression are able to share their experiences, while joining in a study of and growth in God's Word.

One final area of concern, which must be mentioned, is suicide. Suicide is often connected to and results from clinical depression. While depression itself is not necessarily an indicator that someone will become suicidal, thinking about suicide is an indication of depression. As mentioned earlier, it is important for pastors to instruct their members carefully regarding this sin. Suicide is extremely dangerous, for it cuts short our time of grace (cf. Isaiah 55:6-7). Of particular interest are the results of recent studies, which show that people in the depth of clinical depression are less likely to commit suicide than those facing less severe situations. The reason for this, it is thought, is that people in the midst of severe clinical depression do not have the energy to act upon their suicidal thoughts. In fact, the greatest number of successful suicide attempts occurs shortly after beginning medicinal treatment when matters appear to be improving. What happens, however, is that the body comes out of its depressed state, while the mind remains depressed. In this condition individuals have the energy to do what their mind is thinking! Consequently, pastors will want to pay especially close attention to the needs of their members as they begin their medical treatment, so that their minds and hearts may be healed by the Word of God, while the physiological needs of their bodies are being met.¹⁵

Resources Available to Help Us Understand and Assist Our Members in Dealing with Clinical Depression

The Bible will remain our greatest resource in assisting our members with clinical depression. It is only the inspired Word of God revealing its absolute truth that is going to save

and unfailingly serve! As stated earlier, it must be applied carefully, specifically and generously, always with the intent that it may help our members to enjoy both the temporal and eternal blessings of our God.

In addition, we will want to find devotional resources for our members, which will stress God's grace in Christ and His providential care of His believing children. In connection with this objective it may be wise to note that many of the popular devotional books, especially those written from a Reformed perspective, may not be good for people afflicted by depression. Often these books stress God's lordship in our lives and the importance of sanctified living, which are not unscriptural concepts in and of themselves, but they are law-oriented rather than gospel-oriented. In view of the fact that individuals struggling with depression frequently apply the law in its second use as a mirror to show them their sin rather than in its third use as a guide for Christian living, these books will generally be of little comfort, and in fact, they may cause further problems due to the mental state of the depressed person.

There are numerous resources available today for information regarding the medical aspects of clinical depression. Christian counselors can provide reliable pamphlets for a pastor's use or the use of our members. The Center for Disease Control has numerous technical booklets available, covering many aspects of depression. You may find them at www.cdc.gov. The National Mental Health Association likewise may be reached at www.nmha.org. When you reach their website, simply look under "Mental Health Information." These two websites are the primary resource outlets for professionals. Other websites, which provide information on more of a "layman" level, are www.depression.com and www.psychologyinfo.com.

Two books were recommended to me for use: *Overcoming Depression* by Demitri and Janise Papolos, recommended by Dean Marzofka as the best book available on the medical/psychological aspects of clinical depression, and *Happiness is a Choice* by Fran Minirth and Katie Meier, recommended by Daniel Loe as an excellent book to share with those who are depressed.

In Conclusion

If we return to the opening quotation of the apostle Paul from 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, we can summarize the goals of our ministry to the clinically depressed. *"We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many."* Paul and his associates were *'burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that [they] despaired even of life.'* Paul's feelings certainly mirror those of many people who experience clinical depression today. It is our goal as pastors, God willing, through our counseling to lead our members who are suffering from clinical depression to share Paul's resulting insights and experience: *"that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, and does deliver us... and will still deliver us!"* It is likewise our goal that our congregations as Christian communities might be made more aware of this issue, so that we and they can support one another in prayer and then join each other in thanksgiving as the Lord reveals both His presence and His blessing through His Word and within our lives.

Soli Dei Gloria!

Appendix: A Self-Rating Depression Scale taken from *Happiness Is a Choice* by Fran Minirth and Katie Meier, page 28.

Anyone who answers ‘true’ to a majority of the following statements is most certainly depressed and should seek professional assistance before the depression worsens:

- ___ 1. I feel like crying more often now than I did a year ago.
- ___ 2. I feel blue and sad.
- ___ 3. I feel hopeless and helpless a good part of the time.
- ___ 4. I have lost a lot of my motivation.
- ___ 5. I have lost interest in things I once enjoyed.
- ___ 6. I have had thoughts recently that life is just not worth living.
- ___ 7. My sleep has changed of late. I either sleep too much or too little.
- ___ 8. I am losing my appetite.
- ___ 9. I am too irritable.
- ___ 10. I am anxious of late.
- ___ 11. I have less energy than usual.
- ___ 12. Morning is the worst part of the day.
- ___ 13. I find myself introspecting a lot.
- ___ 14. When I look at myself in the mirror, I appear to be sad.
- ___ 15. My self-concept is not very good.
- ___ 16. I worry much about the past.
- ___ 17. I have more physical symptoms, i.e. headaches, upset stomach, constipation, rapid heartbeat, etc. than I did a year ago.
- ___ 18. I believe people have noticed that I do not function as well at my job as I did in the past.

ENDNOTES

¹ Daniel C. Loe, M.S., *Understanding Clinical Depression*, p.1. Daniel Loe is a Christian Therapist employed by Christian Family Counseling of New Ulm, Minnesota. Christian Family Counseling is a ministry of the Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service.

² Ibid., p. 2.

³ Dean Marzofka, M.S., M.S.T., interview.

⁴ Daniel Loe, M.S., *Clinical Depression: Kids and Teens Are Not Exempt*, p. 1.

⁵ Dean Marzofka, interview, in which Mr. Marzofka used as an illustration the fact that Terry Bradshaw, former quarterback of the Pittsburgh Steelers and present television football commentator, suffered clinical depression for twenty years before it was diagnosed.

⁶ James Jefferson, MD and John Greist, MD, *Depression and Older People*, p. 3.

⁷ Channing L. Bete Company, Inc., *Hope and Help for Depression—Self Care Handbook*, p. 6.

⁸ When attempting to diagnose depression among adolescents, Daniel Loe suggests adding the following symptoms to the list: withdrawal from family and friends, irritability, drop in school performance, emotional outbursts, hurting themselves (head-banging, cutting themselves), rebellion, increased risk-taking, antisocial behaviors (truancy, shoplifting, sexual promiscuity), running away from home, negativity.

⁹ The information provided in this paragraph is a summary of a more extensive treatment

of this issue by Pastor L.D. Redlin in his 1984 Minnesota Pastoral Conference essay entitled "Ministering to the Depressed." Copies are available through Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church of Mankato, Minnesota.

¹⁰ It should be noted that individuals suffering clinical depression are quite vulnerable and can be more easily influenced by outside influences, including radio and television evangelists or members of the various sects who visit them in their homes. This danger is compounded by the fact that depressed people have a tendency to avoid crowds and so often refrain from attending worship services.

¹¹ Professor Emeritus Clifford Kuehne has recently recommended "*Together with Jesus: Daily Devotions for a Year*" by Richard E. Lauersdorf (paperback, published by Northwestern in 2003).

¹³ Suggestions by Daniel Loe found in *Understanding Clinical Depression*.

¹⁴ Dean Marzofka, interview.

¹⁵ Dean Marzofka, interview.

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Book Reviews

Richard Cimino, editor: *Lutherans Today - American Lutheran Identity in the 21st Century*, Eerdmans, 2003, paperback, 248 pages.

This book has fourteen different authors, and I suppose they are all associated with the name "Lutheran" in some way. Nevertheless, there is such a great difference these days between Lutherans in America that it is difficult to speak of any kind of "Lutheran identity" in America, which this book seeks to recognize. In the first chapter Mark Noll divides America's Lutherans into three main categories: 1) the smaller Lutheran bodies "marked by pietistic, confessional, or ethnic distinctives" (p. 3); 2) the two major confessional bodies, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS); and 3) the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), "a broad church where hereditary Lutheran practices and principles have been (depending on perspective) blessed or cursed by extensive engagement with modern American culture" (p. 4). The LCMS and WELS "can be classified together," says Noll, "because of a common insistence on strict adherence to the Augsburg Confession and a considerable degree of separation from other Christian groups, often especially other Lutheran groups" (p. 4). It seems better to me to have five categories by dividing the WELS and LCMS from each other and likewise dividing the smaller bodies into those identified with pietism, such as the Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB) and those identified with close adherence to the Lutheran confessions, such as the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC).

Surveys of America's Lutherans as a group are not encouraging. Noll reports: "The Lutheran conception of Law and gospel, steady reliance on a Christ-centered understanding of Scripture, commitment to catechizing the young with materials originating from Martin Luther,

belief in a redeeming work of God in, with, and under the sacraments, and vigorous advocacy of a two-kingdoms theology – these Lutheran distinctives are hard to find in the results gathered by social scientists through mass polling” (p. 16).

The second chapter was written by Mary Todd, LCMS historian with a liberal (she calls it “moderate”) and feminist point of view. She presents the ongoing ideological struggle between the two main factions in the LCMS from 1928 to the present time according to her particular viewpoint. She includes references to the 1945 Statement of the Forty-Four, the 1965 Mission Affirmations, the role of the *Confessional Lutheran* and *Christian News* in the struggle, the 1974 walkout of the majority of the St. Louis seminary teachers and students, the differing emphases of LCMS presidents Alvin Barry and his successor Gerald Kieschnick, and the 2001 New York City prayer service in which an LCMS district president was “accused ... of praying with non - Christians” (p. 42). It’s too bad that equal space was not given to an LCMS spokesman on the other side of this debate. But Mary Todd is certainly correct in her observation: “Missouri once again finds itself, as *Newsweek* had described it in 1971, ‘easily the most polarized Protestant denomination in the United States,’ and caught up in what a friend calls the eschatology of the next convention” (p. 43).

Other chapters present “the Lutheran left” by detailing the sentiment of ELCA leaders (third chapter), *Word Alone*, a conservative element within the ELCA (fourth chapter), “the Evangelical Catholics” (fifth chapter), megachurches in the ELCA (sixth chapter), Lutheran charismatics (seventh chapter), the social theology of Lutheran pastors (eighth chapter), the new ethnic Lutherans (ninth chapter), multiculturalism and difficulties with feminism and sexual morality (tenth chapter), Lutheran higher education (eleventh chapter) and Lutheran youth (last chapter).

I don’t think the CLC is mentioned anywhere in the book. The Introduction states: “There is not much attention given to the smaller Lutheran bodies” (xiv). The WELS is not mentioned often, except in the chapter on multiculturalism. The definition of multiculturalism that is used in this book does not mean bringing the Gospel of Christ to people of other cultures. Surely it would be good that all Lutherans were multicultural in that respect! Multiculturalism as defined in this book, rather, “sees all cultures, and their beliefs, values, mores, and institutions, as essentially equal Multiculturalism sees no culture as superior or inferior to any other” (p. 189). An example of such multiculturalism in reference to sexual morality is seen in the fact that it is now politically incorrect to criticize those who practice homosexuality. Alvin Schmidt, the author of this chapter, says: “If, for instance, one says sexual relations outside of marriage, bearing children out of wedlock, homosexual behavior, same-sex unions, and abortion on demand are wrong or immoral, it is not uncommon for that person to be called bigoted or insensitive” (p. 190).

Professor Schmidt claims to find the beginnings of politically correct multiculturalism in the new hymnal of the WELS, because the wording of the Nicene Creed was changed from “was made man” to “became fully human.” He sees more evidence of multiculturalism in other songbooks that have been introduced in Lutheran churches: *Creative Worship*, *All God’s People Sing* and *This Far by Faith*. His conclusions are that the ELCA has already succumbed to multiculturalism to a large degree and that the other Lutheran church bodies are in serious danger of doing the same. He ends his discussion by saying: “Multiculturalism’s ever-present accompanying forces of political correctness, diversity, and feminism do prompt the question: How long will confessional Lutheran theology, as it was once bequeathed to them by C. F. W. Walther, remain in the LCMS and WELS? If informed, critical examination of multiculturalism, a major threat to confessional Lutheran theology, does not occur in both the LCMS and WELS – and thus far there has been very little of such examination – it would be difficult to argue why both bodies may not eventually succumb to this anti-Christian and anti-Lutheran Zeitgeist, as has happened in the ELCA. Were this to happen, the name ‘Lutheran’ would have a vacuous sound and content, reminiscent of St. Paul’s description to Timothy of those who in the last days will hold to ‘the outward form of godliness, but deny its power’ (2 Timothy 3:5)” (pp. 203 -204).

If the findings given in *Lutherans Today* are close to the truth, then the fact remains that there are not many Lutherans in America today. That is, there are not many Lutherans who agree in their theology and practice with Martin Luther and the confessional Lutherans who compiled the *Book of Concord* of 1580. Nevertheless, the promise of Jesus to preserve His people, the Holy Christian Church, is surely being fulfilled and will continue to be fulfilled, as He declared in Matthew 16:18: "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

Christopher A. Hall: *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, InterVarsity Press, 1998, paperback, 223 pages.

As a former student of Thomas Oden the author of this book informs the reader in the first chapter that Oden began his career as a liberal theologian, who admired such critical scholars as Bultmann and Tillich. In the 1960s, however, Oden realized the dead end of liberal theology and the lifestyle that often accompanied it and for five years devoted himself to the study of the ancient church fathers. This study changed the direction of his thinking. Now Oden is on a campaign to bring back the contributions of the church fathers and to get his readers to study the Scriptures the way the church fathers did. This has resulted in at least two major projects: a three-volume set of systematic theology by Oden (*The Living God, The Word of Life, Life in the Spirit*) and a series of commentaries entitled *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS)*, in which Oden lets the church fathers explain Scripture in their own words. When completed, this series will contain 28 volumes of expository comments on both Old Testament and New Testament books. Thomas Oden is the general editor of this series, and Christopher Hall is associate editor. Another project completed by Oden is a 2002 compilation of what the church fathers wrote on the doctrine of justification, entitled *The Justification Reader*.

Christopher Hall says: "Oden's journey from modern theology to 'paleo-orthodoxy' is remarkable. A number of other theologians and biblical scholars, many of them relatively young, are moving in the same direction" (p. 18). Both Oden and Hall seem to believe that if we could only go back to the early centuries of the church and read the Bible the way the fathers did, we would find the fathers in basic agreement on all the important teachings of the Bible. In the preface to *The Living God*, the first volume in his series on systematic theology, Oden says: "I hope to set forth what is most commonly stated in the central Christian tradition concerning God.... This book is especially for those who have become wearied with ever-changing modern theologies and who now hunger for a plausible restatement of classical Christian teaching of God.... The only claim I make is that there is nothing whatever original in these pages.... My only aim is to present classical Christian teaching of God on its own terms and not in diluted modern terms" (pp. x-xiii).

In his general introduction to *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Oden explains: "The ACCS has three goals: the renewal of Christian *preaching* based on classical Christian exegesis, the intensified study of Scripture by *lay* persons who wish to think with the early church about the canonical text, and the stimulation of Christian historical, biblical, theological and pastoral *scholarship* toward further inquiry into the scriptural interpretations of the ancient Christian writers" (p. xi).

Hall's book serves then as an introduction to both larger projects: the three volumes of dogmatics based on the church fathers and the 28-volume series of commentaries on the Bible based on the exposition of the church fathers. In the first few chapters Hall makes the point that too often Bible scholars today try to interpret the Bible as though no one in previous centuries ever studied these same texts. Hall quotes the dispensationalist Lewis Chafer as priding himself on the fact that he approached the Scriptures "with an unprejudiced mind" and was "concerned only with what the Bible actually teaches" (p. 26). Yet how foolish we would be if we totally ignored what others before us have learned from the Bible! We dare not put any man's

interpretation above the Bible itself, of course, but it is possible that a human interpreter of the Bible may properly recognize the Spirit-intended meaning of the text and direct us to the way of salvation, just as Philip guided the Ethiopian eunuch to find the meaning of Isaiah 53 in Jesus as Christ crucified (Acts 8).

The major portion of Hall's book is devoted to an introduction of the major church fathers: the four doctors of the East (Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil the Great and John Chrysostom) and the four doctors of the West (Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and Gregory the Great). The two ancient schools of Bible interpretation are also described: the allegorical exegesis of Alexandria in Egypt and the more literal approach of Antioch in Syria. My own favorite is John Chrysostom, of whom Hall says: "Chrysostom, of all the fathers, is perhaps most practical and specific in the applications he draws from these texts" (p. 175).

The last chapter of Hall's book is entitled "Making Sense of Patristic Exegesis." Some helpful conclusions are drawn: "The fathers insist that the narrative of the Bible is a continuous, deeply connected story from Genesis through Revelation.... The fathers insist that the biblical narrative reaches its culmination, its thematic climax, with the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God... Unanimously they 'held that the entire Old Testament – and most particularly the Psalms – is for the most part Christological'" (pp. 191 -192).

As confessional Lutherans today we realize that Martin Luther was certainly helped in his understanding of the Bible by reading the writings of Augustine. Martin Chemnitz, the second Martin of the Reformation, was especially well-versed in the writings of the fathers. Both of these men were thus able to show that the teaching of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake was not new or unknown. The fathers themselves knew the way of salvation through Christ and taught it to others.

At the same time we need to be on our guard in dealing with the fathers' theology. Theodore Dierks, a Lutheran scholar, pointed out in his treatise *Reconciliation and Justification* (a 1938 published work of Concordia): "Our study has clearly shown that the writers in the early Church built their theology on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and that their theology as a whole was a restatement of the Scriptural truth" (p. 161). Oden and Hall would heartily agree with this conclusion. In contrast, however, Dierks has observed that "most of these Church Fathers did not hold fast to the objective reconciliation and justification as an accomplished fact, and therefore the Scriptural doctrine of the subjective justification, *i.e.*, justification by faith alone, gradually became justification by faith and works and then justification mainly by works, faith being regarded only as assent to the Rule of Faith. Most of these Church Fathers did not have a proper conception of the Gospel... They could not and did not rightly distinguish between Law and Gospel, and thus they corrupted the truth of Scripture" (pp. 161 -162).

Because of this early falling away of the fathers in regard to justification, the fond hope of Oden and Hall will, no doubt, not come to pass. Their hope is that by the study of the church fathers Christians of all stripes (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist) will be able to come to an agreement on the basic Bible teachings, and on that basis the outward church will become more united and more orthodox. Nevertheless, there is certainly merit in listening to the fathers and possibly becoming more enlightened on certain obscure passages, especially those dealing with the customs and practices of those times. Certainly we can rejoice whenever Christ is preached by them and the way of salvation is properly elucidated through their exposition of Scripture.

Michael Green: *Thirty Years That Changed the World - The Book of Acts for Today*, Eerdmans, 1993, 2002, paperback, 287 pages.

From the author of *Evangelism in the Early Church* and *Evangelism through the Local Church* comes another popular study of early evangelism, which concentrates on Luke, Book II,

or as it is usually known, the book of Acts. It is indeed remarkable that from 30 AD to 60 AD the Gospel of Jesus Christ made its way to so many places within the Roman Empire and perhaps beyond its borders as well.

Michael Green does not take the reader through Acts chapter by chapter, but rather studies various topics in the light of the whole message of Acts, giving many specific examples from the book of Acts. The topics studied include the personnel involved, their approach, their lifestyle, their message, their apologetics, their methods, their church planting, their pastoral care, their church life, their leadership, their hardships and their priorities. As he leads the reader through these topics, he makes comparisons between what happened then and what is happening today in North America and Europe and in third world countries. Of course, the main Man at work in all of this has been and still is the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, whom He sent into the world at Pentecost to empower His disciples for this work.

Michael Green recognizes that the content of the message is all-important. The early Christians talked about Jesus: Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures; Jesus as the God-man sent to this earth for the salvation of mankind; Jesus as crucified, risen, reigning and returning as Judge. They were unwilling to change the message in order to be accepted. Green says: "The pluralism all round them was even more pervasive than it is today. The temptation to syncretism was even more appealing then than now. But they would have nothing of it. And I can just imagine what they would say about our inter-faith services, our massive syncretism, our willingness to compromise on the essentials of the faith, and our lack of conviction about what we believe and why" (p. 92).

Along with this determination not to tamper with the message itself also came a flexibility in method and approach. The sermons in the book of Acts were as different as the persons to whom these sermons were addressed. Paul did not speak to the Athenians as he spoke to synagogue Jews. Since the Christians had no church buildings, they made use of all kinds of meeting places: the temple in Jerusalem at first, then synagogues of the Jews, rented buildings, the great outdoors and especially the homes of Christians. Their main concern was not maintenance of building and grounds but outreach, outreach, outreach. However, they were not concerned only with sowing the seed. They were very much interested in pastoral follow-up and further instruction, teaching the whole counsel of God.

Green thinks that our method of training preachers and evangelists is unwise. "These Apostles knew that you do not train people behind desks and with books. You train them in the heat of battle and with real encounters. You rarely get good ministers in churches if the only way that you train them is to take them away from their homes, send them to college where they prepare with *book* learning for an *oral* ministry, make them sit at a desk to listen to a professor lecturing, and require them to do very little in the cause of the gospel when they are there, apart, perhaps, from preaching one or two rather artificial sermons to fellow students" (p. 213). Along the same line Green believes that our common practice of having one pastor at the head of a congregation is also unwise. The book of Acts, in his estimation, stresses team ministry. The apostle Paul, for example, had a team of evangelists with whom he labored and whom he trained. And the congregation at Ephesus was led by a team of elders.

On the subject of charismatic gifts, I believe Green is too ready to believe that the same gifts evident in the book of Acts – speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, visions – are found in our present-day churches as well. He says: "Initially I believed God no longer guided people in this way. I then reluctantly had to accept the extensive evidence that came my way to show that he did, at all events to Christians in Two Thirds World countries" (p. 202). Again he says: "Do not think that visions went out with the apostolic age. God can and does still guide through this medium. But it is very easy to be mistaken" (p. 151). Green believes that the tongues-speaking in Jerusalem on Pentecost was not the utterance of known languages, but speaking in unknown languages. He also maintains that the miracle of the people's understanding these tongues (cf. Acts 2:8-11) was in their hearing of them rather than in the speaking.

There are other areas as well where we cannot agree with Green: his decision theology, his references to the Lord's Supper, his willingness to cooperate with others as long as there are no major differences in doctrine. For example, this is what he says on the subject of Christian unity: "Christian unity is of the utmost importance, and the early Christians knew it. They contemplated division for only two causes. One was prominent and persistent public sin. The other was major doctrinal error" (p. 282). I suppose we should be happy that he allows for a division based on doctrine. But where can one find the Scripture that distinguishes "major" doctrine from minor doctrine? "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9).

It is obvious that the author of this book is excited about evangelism, and he wants Christian readers to be excited about it too. One of his main themes, repeated throughout the book, is that Christians in Africa, Asia and South America seem to be more like the Christians in Acts in their evangelistic zeal than the Christians in Europe and North America. For example, Green asks at the close of his book: "Do we really believe that Jesus is God himself who has come to share our nature, rescue us from our alienation from God and accompany us not only alongside but inside our lives? If so, there can be only one proper attitude for the disciple of such a Master: total and wholehearted obedience. I see it in many parts of Asia and Africa. I see it in Chinese who are prepared to tramp through trackless wastes of Mongolia to bring the gospel of Jesus to unreached areas. I see it in the fearless enthusiasm of Latin Americans.... I see it in the dedication of men like an African friend in Zaire who is prepared to go alone and without resources deep into the forest jungles to bring the gospel to the pygmy people. I see it in the skyscrapers and sophisticated business milieu of Singapore.... But I do not see it a great deal in the West" (pp. 286-287).

The last chapter of the book deals with priorities. Surely what he says in this chapter is vitally important. What were the priorities of the early Christians as described in the book of Acts? Green's list is given in this order: prayer, the word, outreach, unity, the Holy Spirit, wholeheartedness. We conclude this review with a quotation about the priority of the word. "If we are to profit from the priorities of these early Christians, there are few areas to which we need to pay closer heed than to the word they preached. We need to study it sympathetically, to know our way around it, to use it to help others individually and in public preaching. We need to train others in its effective use. We need to have confidence in it. The Bible is not a book about us in search of God. It is the record of God in search of us. It is revelation, and we need therefore to come to grips with it at every level, for it contains the message of what God requires of us and what he has done for us. The only Christianity which will go on to be effective in the twenty-first century is a Christianity that has been pruned to its biblical core" (pp. 275-276).

R. C. Sproul: *Willing to Believe – The Controversy over Free Will*, Baker Books, 1997, paperback, 223 pages.

As one who embraces Calvinistic theology, R. C. Sproul espouses the Biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone and thus is able to discern the errors of synergistic Arminianism and decision theology. He cannot be relied on, however, to detect the errors of Calvinism or the distinction in teaching between Martin Luther and John Calvin. Keeping his theological background in mind, we seek to evaluate Sproul's treatment of a significant area of doctrinal concern: understanding the involvement of man's will in conversion.

After a chapter that introduces the reader to such concepts as total depravity and free will, Sproul provides the views of nine theologians from the distant and more recent past: Pelagius (354 - ?), Augustine (354-430), John Cassian (360-435) and the semi-Pelagians, Martin Luther (1517-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), James Arminius (1560-1609), Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Charles Finney (1792-1875) and Lewis Chafer (1871-1952).

Using Scripture as the only criterion, we recognize in this book the portrayal of those theologians who, in faithful accord with Scripture, have taught the total depravity of man and man's complete inability to assist in any way in his own conversion. These men were Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. We recognize the other five as those who rejected God's teachings on grace and falsely ascribed to man a free will that enabled him to make the choice to believe and accept Christ.

The most extreme in their views were Pelagius and Charles Finney. Pelagius, for example, taught that man is good by nature and has the ability to avoid sin. In his view the work of Christ was chiefly to give man a good example. Charles Finney was just as bad, if not worse, in that he boldly denied that Christ's death was a necessary sacrifice to atone for sin. In his view the way of salvation is the way of total consecration to God. Sproul quotes an awful statement of Finney that he correctly labels as "the worst of all possible news," for Finney said: "Present, full, and entire consecration of heart and life to God and His service is an unalterable condition of present pardon of past sin, and of present acceptance with God" (p. 178). For Finney conversion is man's choice, not God's gracious action. "Regeneration consists in the sinner changing his ultimate choice, intention, [or] preference" (p. 185). Since Finney is generally regarded as the inventor of modern mass evangelism methods, Sproul makes the pertinent comment: "Finney's theology has had a massive influence on modern evangelism, which makes a 'decision' the necessary prerequisite for regeneration.... It is at this point that Pelagianism has a stranglehold on the evangelical church today" (p. 185).

In connection with his presentation on James Arminius, the champion of what he called "prevenient grace," Sproul points out the errors of Clark Pinnock, an Arminian theologian active today. In his opposition to any kind of predestination by God, Pinnock goes so far as to question God's omniscience and omnipotence. Unfortunately, it is in this chapter that Sproul's Calvinism also reveals itself, in that he promotes John Calvin's teaching of irresistible grace.

The chapter on Lewis Chafer is of special interest because Chafer, a Dispensationalist theologian, considered himself to be a Calvinist rather than an Arminian. Sproul clearly shows, however, that Chafer taught that man first must believe before God responds to man's faith by regenerating him. In Chafer's own words: "God's answer to an individual's faith in Christ is such that by the power of God he is born of God and thus becomes an actual son of His" (p. 194). Here Sproul rightly shows that regeneration must precede faith (as its cause), not follow it. Chafer's view is actually synergism, for how can a man who is totally depraved and dead in sin even begin to believe in Christ? Sad to say, Chafer's views are held and promoted by Campus Crusade with its *Four Spiritual Laws* and also by such as Billy Graham and Norman Geisler.

Because of Sproul's Calvinistic views I cannot recommend this book except to very discerning readers who are interested in ancient and current examples of synergism.

- David Lau