

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 51

DECEMBER 2011

NUMBER 4

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The Petitions of the Lord's Prayer in Light of the Lord's Passion

Frank Gantt

* The 2006 Lenten series under the title above concludes with the initial sermon offered in this issue. In his sixth and final installment the writer covered the last two Petitions along with the Doxology, using the text below, Luke 22:31-34. In the interest, however, of providing a fuller treatment of the Seventh Petition and the Doxology, two additional sermons are here included from the writer's 2008 Sunday series on Luther's Small Catechism.

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION **(Luke 22:31-34)**

"It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:6-7). Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus:

Tonight our series ends virtually in the same place where it began six weeks ago—on the confidence of our faith in God. We began our discussion of the Lord's Prayer with the reminder that when we call God "Father," we do so at His gracious invitation. We come in boldness and confidence as dear children ask their dear father. Tonight we take up the remaining words of the Lord's Prayer as the focus of our Lenten meditation and close it with the apt word "Amen." *Amen* is surely a word of confidence, as Luther writes:

"Amen, Amen," that is, "Yes, indeed, it shall be so!"

Now before we get to that word of confidence, we have to consider words that often cause fear and doubt to arise: what Jesus says about temptation and evil. We remember that we are still in this world with the weaknesses of our flesh and with the evil that the devil is all too happy to continue working. So how, in the face of our own weakness and the devil's might, do we come to possess such confidence? The answer comes in our text for this evening, what Jesus said as written in Luke 22:31-34:

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

These words are written that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. To this end we pray: Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord; Your Word is truth. Amen.

There is a fundamental point about our relationship to God that we're always close to forgetting. As we look at the relationships we have with others, we notice that those relationships, almost without exception, take effort on the part of both individuals. It's true in the marriage relationship, the parent-child relationship, even in our business relationships. And because it's such a common truth, we easily fall into the trap of thinking that our relationship to God works the same way. We may even conclude that when God does His part of saving me, I on my part, to show Him how much I appreciate what He has done, have to do the right things to remain in that salvation. What a great danger that way of thinking is.

The danger is exemplified in the life of Peter, the Lord's disciple. Peter was a proud man. He often took it upon himself to speak for the other disciples. Sometimes he got the answer right, but sometimes his answer was all wrong, as we see in the account of our text. Jesus informed Peter that Satan had asked to have his way with all the disciples. In English we no longer use a different word for the 2nd person singular (*thou*) and plural (*ye*) pronouns. But in the Greek the text makes clear with the plural form that Satan had asked for all of the disciples and not just Peter.

Now listen to how Jesus describes what Satan wanted to do to them: "*Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.*" Wheat back then was broken up by treading the grains, which were then put and shaken in a basket or a sieve. It doesn't sound so bad at first, but imagine yourself as a tiny kernel of grain, bounced around violently in a giant sieve. Satan wanted to bring such turmoil into the lives of the disciples that they would question, doubt, and potentially lose the promises of grace that Jesus had delivered to their hearts. Satan was going to use the Passion of the Savior as the opportunity to shake them up with such turmoil that very night.

But Peter in his pride did not think it would go the way Jesus said. In Peter's mind Jesus was underestimating his loyalty and his strength of character. And so he responds, "*Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.*" In Matthew's account the firm resolve of Peter comes out in his emphatic claim, "*Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will **never** be made to stumble*" (Matt. 26:33). Well, the false bravado became quite clear only hours later when Peter and the other disciples fled from the Garden of Gethsemane, and Peter then fulfilled the prophetic word of his Lord. Three times he denied even knowing Jesus, a denial he affirmed with cursing and swearing. How bitter his own words must have tasted when he heard the rooster crow and Jesus turned to look at him.

Surely Peter had a desire to be faithful to Jesus. The problem is that he looked for a good outcome in the wrong place. He looked inwardly for the strength to resist temptation and the strength to be delivered from Satan's evil schemes. In essence Peter was saying: For Thine is the kingdom, but it's my power and glory. But basing confidence in his own abilities, Peter could not bear up under the temptation that he tried to face alone.

It's a hard lesson to learn, and unfortunately, one that we need to learn again and again. We come to church and hear a Word of God that addresses a specific problem or weakness in our lives. Or perhaps as we read the Bible at home, a blind spot in our walk with Christ is revealed to us. That is, some way in which the devil has crept into our lives through sin. And we rightly recognize the danger present with the sin. But how often don't we also think to ourselves: "I have to set this right. It will require discipline and hard work on my part, but I will see that it's done." But then we find that weeks, if not days later, we have

fallen back into the same path of sin. We find ourselves frustrated again and again like that. We desire our marriages to be a better reflection of Christ and the Church. We want to do a better job of raising and disciplining our children. We desire to show our Savior's love for others at work, among the sick and elderly, even here at church. In short, we want to be faithful in confessing Christ in all areas of our lives.

These are all good desires, right, even as Peter desired to be faithful to Jesus that night? The problem is where we look for the power to do such things. Too often our motto seems to be: If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself. And that's why we fail. We forget that we don't have the ability to do it right. If we did, we would not need Jesus. Peter's fall to temptation is certainly an accurate reflection of you and me—our own failure as we look inwardly for strength to resist temptation and to gain our own deliverance from evil.

Now in this constant reality we see the absolute grace of our Father and our Savior at work. Jesus knew full well what Peter would do, that in relying on himself he would enter into temptation and fail miserably, even to the point of denying his Lord. What did Jesus pray for while having this knowledge? Did He pray that His Father would bring swift justice to bear and have Peter suffer for his treacherous behavior? No, He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Peter would fail his Savior, but his Savior did not fail him.

It is the same in our lives today. Our God is not waiting for us to fall so that He can quickly, while we are yet in sin, get even with us. God is not out there putting temptation in our paths so that He can then condemn us. If that were His objective, He would have been done with us long ago. God has one objective toward man, one desire for sinners: that they all come to faith in Christ Jesus, remain in that faith until the end, and possess forever the gift of eternal life with Him. But He doesn't sit back and merely desire it; He works to make it happen.

We keep this truth in mind as we examine the occasion Satan had to sift the disciples as wheat and to tempt Peter as he did. Don't forget the setting. Jesus was to go on trial for His life. As He had previously informed the disciples, He was going to be handed over to the Gentiles, then mocked, spat upon, and crucified. Why did God permit all that to come upon Jesus? So that Satan could tempt Peter? It was rather to accomplish what He had long promised: His eternal victory for all sinners. Jesus was going to that cross willingly to turn into good what Satan would try to use for evil. Jesus would suffer for Peter's sin—not just this sin, but all of them—even as He would suffer for the sins of the whole world. Jesus did not want Peter to miss out on what He would die to obtain for him and for all others. And so He prayed that Peter's faith—that which rests on the power of God—would not fail.

What Jesus did for Peter is no isolated event, but something we should take to heart as our own hope under similar circumstances. We often find ourselves bombarded by temptation, and because of our own delusions of inner strength, we fall to temptation. Now what does that show us? Our constant need of a Savior, whom we have in Christ Jesus. And though we have failed Him many times, He does not fail us, nor does our Father in heaven. The good news of the Gospel continues to be the power of God to salvation, and the faith that claims salvation continues to be the work of God. The God who took such great steps to send His Son into the world to suffer and die in our place, the God who has given us His Word and preserved it down through the ages in spite of Satan's raging against it, the God who poured out His Spirit into our hearts through baptism, making us one of His dear children, does not turn it all over to Satan so that he might bring it to ruin. Rather, God is actively at work, giving us ways out of temptation, delivering us from the evil that Satan works, and upholding us so that our faith does not fail. It is with this understanding that we pray in our Sunday worship: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Thus we conclude our prayer on this confident note: "*For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen!*" It is God's kingdom that has been established in our own hearts. With His mighty power to save He keeps that kingdom in place and causes its influence to grow within us. In the same powerful way He makes us fit for daily service in the work of His kingdom. In Peter's case the Lord used him to strengthen his brothers in the faith. Peter would for a time be a leader of the Church in Jerusalem. Later in life, he would have another opportunity to confess his allegiance to Christ as he faced martyrdom. But in that moment, relying solely on the power of God, Peter would remain

faithful to His Lord and thus enjoy the fruits of Christ's victory on the cross over Satan. For all such triumphs of Christian faith we join with the psalmist in exclaiming, "*This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes*" (Ps. 118:23 NAS).

But let us not sit back in mere amazement at what the Lord accomplished for Peter. Let it also be our refuge and comfort in every temptation that we face, namely, that the Lord's strength is made perfect in our weakness too. What we have no ability to accomplish ever, our Lord can and will accomplish in us. Of that we can be confident always, as we, like the Apostle Paul, get to boast in our own weaknesses and in the expectation that the power of Christ to save will rest upon us. In Jesus' name it is so. Amen!

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

(John 16:33)

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father who "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). Amen.

It is amazing how much money is spent in the attempt to gain security by way of insurance. A person can buy health insurance, auto insurance, life insurance, postal delivery insurance, dental insurance, flood insurance, drought insurance, tornado and hurricane insurance, and more. It's ironic that we spend so much money on insurance against catastrophic events, even though the insurance policy and its terms of coverage do not make anyone secure against any of those things. By purchasing life insurance, for example, no one supposes that he has a safeguard against death. In fact, he purchases such a policy because he is quite certain that one day he will die.

Wouldn't it be nice if we had insurance that actually brings security, that is, a guarantee against the possibility of something bad happening to us? Well, we do. Perhaps you were not aware that such insurance existed, but you ought to be, since you mention it every time you pray the Lord's Prayer. It's tied up with the Seventh Petition, and it is to this point that we direct our hearts as we listen to the promise of Jesus in John 16:33: "***These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.***"

Let's take a moment to consider from history what qualifies as the single most catastrophic day ever. Most of us remember 9-11. Many lost their lives when terrorists destroyed the buildings of the World Trade Center. Was that the most catastrophic day in history so far? Was it the day that Hurricane Katrina flooded the city of New Orleans and displaced so many families? Was it the Battle of Gettysburg or the Normandy Invasion on D-Day? Was it the day when Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried an entire city? Was it the day when the Great Flood sent the entire world population minus eight to a watery grave? All of these events have something in common; they are marked by death and destruction. But as terrible as each of these days were in their own right, none of them can compare with the darkest day of all time.

On *the* most catastrophic day in history there were no camera crews or reporters on site. No special bulletins would interrupt a regularly scheduled program on TV or radio. In fact, there were just two people present. The date is impossible to determine. The place cannot be found. No memorial was built to draw attention to *the* most infamous event—one that would so thoroughly change the course of the world. The two witnesses were Adam and Eve and the place was the Garden of Eden. There Satan tempted Eve into sin, and Adam willingly joined in the rebellion against God. Their sin brought death and destruction—not just on themselves, but also on every subsequent generation of people all the way down to the present time! Having rebelled against God in heaven, Satan wanted to bring evil into God's perfect world. He wanted to bring death and destruction on the crown of God's creation, the people He had made in His holy image to be His holy children.

Before that day came, everything was perfect. Since that day nothing in this world is perfect. Before that day there was perfect fellowship and peace between God and man. Since that day man by nature continues to be at enmity against God. Before that day life was perfect and death non-existent. Since that day everyone's life is a march toward death that can't be stopped. Before that day there were

no funeral homes, hospitals, sympathy cards, or welfare programs. Since that day those things have become so common that people now make a living in providing them to others.

Seeing the great evil that Satan had wrought, God came to the rescue. He came to Adam and Eve to confront them with their sin and also to comfort them with His grace and mercy. He promised to send someone who would crush the head of Satan and deliver Adam and Eve and all their children from eternal wrath and destruction. That promise He kept when He sent His own Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem us from the curse of that Law, which we all have broken too many times to count. He provided us with the ultimate deliverance by taking every act of disobedience, every thought of lust or pride, every word of anger and hatred, and placing them all—every sin of every person—on Christ Jesus. Then with the heaping, stinking mass of sin laid upon Him, God let out the fury of His anger on His only begotten Son while He hung on the cross. The result of that great act of love is that God looks upon each and every person in the world and declares each one not guilty—of any sin! He looks upon each one of you and says: Whatever sins you committed last year, or last week, or last night, I remember no more; we are again at perfect peace.

Satan, meanwhile, not wanting anyone to have this peace, makes use of sinful man to get us all to doubt God's gift of love, the restored peace that comes through Christ. He uses the corruption of sin that is in the world to work fear and uncertainty in our hearts and lives. And especially against those who by faith have tasted the sweet grace of God, Satan continues to wage his war through the evil works of ungodly people. Thus we have examples like Cain murdering Abel, the Egyptians oppressing the children of Israel, the unbelieving Jews stoning Stephen and Paul, and the Romans persecuting and executing the early Christians.

So it continues in our own day. Not only are radical Muslims hell-bent on destroying all Christians in the world, but we also see greedy, oppressive individuals in our own nation who seek to set themselves up against the Lord and His Christ, as David says in Psalm 2. We see people protesting in the streets of California, even to the point of violence, because they are not permitted to have legal marriages in their homosexual relationships. We witness the ever-increasing hatred for everything and everyone godly under the guise of rights and freedom and enlightenment. These things are effective at striking fear in the hearts of Christians, as we ponder what the future holds for us and for our children.

In this land of prosperity, in this time of abundance we almost lose sight of what Jesus said to His disciples in our text: *"In the world you will have tribulation."* The words of the Seventh Petition serve partially as a reminder that Satan and the world are trying to bring evil upon believers in Christ. Evil is defined as that which injures and does harm, not only to our bodies, but also to our souls. When we understand evil in that way, we can see a wide variety of harm that Satan and the world try to bring to our souls. Every negative thing that happens to the body has an impact on the soul. It's true with sicknesses and injuries, and it's true with temptation and sin. While we are in the world, there will be no shortage of ways that the devil seeks to inflict some harm upon us, with his prime goal being the damage he can do to our spiritual life.

Even worse is the fact that we are no match for the devil and his worldly allies. There is only so much we can do about the evil taking place around us (assuming that we want to). And because we are the children of Adam and Eve, we are filled with the same lusts and desires. The harsh reality is that evil is not just all around us, but also within us. And so we pray in this petition that, as Luther aptly explained, "Our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil that threatens body and soul, property and reputation."

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, it was never His intention to lead them to fear and despair. He certainly wanted them to acknowledge their own weaknesses and realize their complete dependence on God. The Seventh Petition does acknowledge the existence of evil, both in the world and in our own lives. But even more, it appeals to our God to act according to His mercy, use His almighty power, and deliver His people from every evil that they face.

, we hear Jesus reminding us that as we live in the world, we will face tribulation. Is this some sort of contradiction? No, not when we look at things from God's perspective. God promises that for those who love God, the ones He has called according to His saving purpose, all things, including

tribulations, work together for good (Rom. 8:28). As strange as it may sound, the illness that struck you or one of your loved ones is indeed for your good or their good. We aren't always able to see what specific good God is accomplishing, but trusting in His promise to do so, we go forward with confidence and joy. That's exactly what Jesus wanted to instill in His disciples when He spoke the words of our text. Not only did He remind them of tribulation; He gave them this Word of truth to cling to: *"But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

Jesus died to take away the sins of the world, because all the wickedness of the world was sealed with His body in the tomb, because Jesus rose from the dead to prove that the old evil foe has been defeated once and for all, the Seventh Petition takes on a whole new meaning. "Deliver us from evil" is not only our prayer for the present; it is God's promise for our future. It is our expectation from Him that life will again be perfect one day, and every evil, including death and devil, will be gone forever. "Deliver us from evil" finds its ultimate fulfillment in the permanent outcome of Judgment Day, the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). Yes, Jesus' death and resurrection give us the confidence to say with Paul as he neared the end of his life on earth: *"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom"* (2 Tim. 4:18 NIV). Amen!

**FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND
THE GLORY FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN.**

* The following sermon was preached on November 23, 2008, just a few weeks after the 2008 presidential election.

Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, whose love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Amen.

With the exception of a few run-offs yet to take place, the election cycle has come to an end. No doubt, many of us are ready to hear nothing more of politics for quite some time. But let me ask one question: How many promises made by those elected do you expect to be kept? Can we really anticipate that the president-elect, for example, will keep all the promises that he made on the campaign trail? How about our elected senators? They all made promises. Will all or some or none of those promises be kept?

I imagine that most of us have grown a little callous in this regard. We are used to hearing politicians make promises for the purpose of political gain, only to go back on their word once they have taken office. And it's not just elected officials of whom we expect such a pattern to be true. It has almost become a fact of our existence that people from other walks of life will promise something and not deliver. I once bought a computer from a company that promised a \$200 cash rebate. I sent in the rebate certificate and never received the \$200. The certificate conveniently got lost along with the only receipt that proved I had made the purchase.

Since this kind of disappointment is so prevalent in our world, it is very easy to become a bit skeptical about many other things, including our faith and all that it entails. That is why our text for today and Luther's explanation to the conclusion of Lord's Prayer is always so timely for us. We read from 2 Corinthians 1:18-22:

But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

The word "Amen" is a rather unique word. It is one of the few words of the English language that comes directly from the Hebrew. In Hebrew the "e" is pronounced "ay," but other than that it remains exactly the same. *Amen* means "truth." What's interesting is that in every other language of the world, Christians use not their own word for "truth" to close a prayer, but a simple, transliterated "Amen." It's as though this one word expresses in its own way the unity of the Church down through the ages.

Few other words, if any, could have such a fitting status because this one word captures the entire

Christian faith from beginning to end. *Amen* is a word of confidence. *Amen* is a word of trust. *Amen* is a word of faith. But confidence, trust, and faith in what? In the very promises of God. But there's more, on which I want to focus your hearts today.

One of the great failures of confessing Christians down through the ages is that we have not communicated to the world around us that ours is a religion that is, above all else, *positive* in both character and promise. We have failed to disabuse the world of the appalling misconception that Christianity is a dour, forbidding, and gloomy religion, a religion of “*No!*” and “*Don't!*” rather than “*Yes!*” and “*Done!*” We do this whenever we give the outside world the idea that our religion prevents us from doing a wide variety of things that we otherwise would love to do if only we were not members of a Christian congregation. We give the impression to the world that we are unwilling slaves to an oppressive belief system.

Our text makes short work of any such misconception that Christianity is primarily a religion of prohibition and condemnation. Just listen to the tone of Paul's inspired words: “*For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us. . . was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*” We have to work pretty hard to get the sense of dour or forbidding or gloomy out of these words, don't we? What is it, after all, that these words are telling us? They certainly are not picturing Christianity in any sort of negative light. Far from it, for they breathe joyful assurance and confidence concerning that which now is and that which is to come. What is the basis of such confidence and assurance? That these promises are all founded on Jesus Christ, the One who never fails.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ comprise the single most positive thing ever to happen both in this world and to this world. “*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*” (John 3:17). In fact, apart from Him everything is truly gloomy. Think about it. If you had no connection to Christ, then you could chase after all those things that are gratifying to the flesh, living for the moment in selfish pride and unrestrained lust, but all the while you would rush headlong into an eternity of suffering in hell. Talk about gloomy. There is nothing worse than that. That is always the route and the destination where sin will take you.

Well, that is exactly what Christ came to free us from: our sin and the condemnation that it brings. Jesus kept the law perfectly every moment of His life on earth, and then He gave that life on the cross as full payment for the sum total of all people's sins. On the cross He paid for every last one of them, just as He announced shortly before His death: “*It is finished!*” That short statement was not a foreboding and forbidding word. It was and is a word of accomplishment and victory, not just for Christ, but for sinners. It was Christ's Amen to John 3:16.

That is the sum and substance of our Christian faith. Now consider: Is there anything negative expressed? Anything uncertain or oppressive? Not even the slightest trace. It is this positive, saving message that the Apostle Paul was called to proclaim to the people in Corinth. His ministry among them had been a ministry of “*Yes*” because his ministry was simple: Tell people of the promises of God in Christ. Tell them how Christ has freed all from the slavery to sin and the sting of death. Tell them how God promised to send a Savior from sin and death and how God indeed kept that promise. Tell them how God promised life and salvation and how that promise is truly given and fulfilled through Christ.

Personally for me this text is a wonderful reminder of what my ministry here is to be among you. Many are the times that I get wrapped up and concerned with all the spiritual dangers that exist to the many souls I am called to watch out for—so focused on the negatives—that I lose sight of the fact that my ministry is a ministry of “*Amen*.” In Christ God has forgiven your sins. In Christ God has called you out of the kingdom of darkness and conveyed you into the kingdom of the Son of His love. In Christ God is pleased to deliver to you the kingdom of His grace and His glory. These are all promises that God has called me to proclaim to you, and all of His promises are *Yes* in Christ, and in Him *Amen*.

What better word can we use to close our prayers than “*Amen*”? Luther explains that the word means, “*Yes, indeed, it shall be so.*” It a word of confidence that the God who has promised to hear our prayers will grant our petitions according to His good and gracious will. But it's more than that. “*Amen*” takes us back to the foot of the cross where we see God's faithfulness to everything that He promised.

There we find the Seed of the woman crushing Satan's head. There we find the virgin's Son bruised for our iniquities. There we find God's own Son given so that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. We conclude our prayers on that same solid ground, confident that if God "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?" (Rom. 8:32).

Yes, in Christ Jesus we have every reason to be positive—positive about our redemption, positive about our eternal future, and also positive in our prayers and in our testimony to the world. For in Christ all the promises of God are Yes and Amen. AMEN!

Journal of Theology: Fifty Years Ago

Two of the reprints selected for this December issue address the impact of Ephesians 1:19 on the doctrine of conversion. Edmund Reim wrote them in successive issues (1:4, Oct. 1961, and 1:5, Dec. 1961) as companion pieces, with material quoted from Stoeckhardt, Lenski, and the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon. In the reprint versions below all the documentation is given parenthetically per MLA guidelines. See page 28 for Works Cited. Reim's two footnotes have become endnotes on page 20.

As the final reprint from Volume 1 we offer to our readers a sample of the *Journal's* Panorama section. Written by C. M. Gullerud, "A Tribute to Walther" (1:5, Dec. 1961, pp. 30-33) was a brief observation article, which now seems timely in view of the 200th anniversary of Walther's birth. Gullerud's quotations of Preus have also been documented by the same MLA guidelines and under the same Works Cited section on page 28 of this issue.

The three reprints below conclude the Volume 51 series, "*Journal of Theology: Fifty Years Ago.*"

The Power of God, Ephesians 1:19

Edmund Reim

In an earlier issue of this *Journal* (April, 1961) we presented a discussion of what we called "The Imperatives of Scripture." The article was written out of genuine concern over our inborn tendency to read into certain terms, on the basis of their grammatical form, the idea of LAW—even though context and use show them clearly to be purest Gospel. It is quite obvious that this can only lead to a grave misunderstanding and eventual gross misuse of such terms.

There is a similar tendency, also inborn, to take out of certain terms and passages a thought-content that is clearly there, but which presents certain difficulties to our human way of thinking, perhaps because it is so great and rich that it defies our efforts to fit it into the mold of our human terminology and classification. To find this tendency even in the case of some outstanding theologian should not be surprising. Nor does it, of course, imply that we must therefore question his personal faith. Operating with our human methods of thought and speech, influenced by our human feelings and emotions, cramped by our human limitations of perception and understanding, we all fall short, again and again, of fully comprehending what our God tells us about Himself. So we lapse into the old failing of drawing Him down to our level, likening Him to ourselves, to the inevitable detriment of our conception of His true greatness and glory. How easily this can happen may be seen if we take as an illustration the passage referred to above (Eph. 1:19) and note the startling difference between two outstanding Lutheran commentators, Stoeckhardt and Lenski, on the subject of the power of God.

The passage is from Paul's great prayer in behalf of his Ephesians, as we find it in his first chapter [verses 17-20 KJV]: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: (18) The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, (19) And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who

believe, according to the working of his mighty power, (20) Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. . . .”

At the critical point [verse 19] Stoeckhardt’s translation is quite parallel to the King James Version quoted above except for one significant point which even Stoeckhardt’s translator, Dr. Sommer, failed to notice. For it is not an oversight when Stoeckhardt, omitting the comma that most versions have, translates: “the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe according to the working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ. . . .” It is his considered purpose to point out the close connection between our faith and the power of God (see the underlined words above). For he writes: “The very fact that we now believe, that faith now lives in us, that has been wrought through the working of the power of God’s might” (Stoeckhardt 105). The thought is carried even farther:

The Apostle definitely emphasizes the fact that our status of faith, according to its beginning, its progress, and its end (that is meant by the ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας), rests upon the might and power of God. The Apostle here heaps, as it were, the synonyms which express God’s power. He wishes to impress upon us that we owe our faith to the might and power of God, which is stronger than everything else, the omnipotence of God, which, as Hofmann correctly explains, conquers even the most stubborn resistance. Everything in us and in our nature resists faith, Christ, and the Gospel of Christ. Faith is repugnant to the corrupt nature of man. Man resists God and His Christ with every shred of natural power within him. This hatred, enmity, and resistance to Christ is the most intensive demonstration of human energy of the natural man. And now God, the Father of glory, glorifies His almighty power just in this way that He conquers this resistance in man, makes this man obedient to the Gospel, changes the enmity against Christ, and then suppresses the resisting flesh in the Christian and preserves faith, as it were, against the constant and continued protest of the flesh. The production and preservation of faith is the chief triumph of divine omnipotence. (Stoeckhardt 105-06)

Reminding his readers of an earlier section (on verse 13) where he had stated that, however, all force and compulsion are excluded from this saving activity of God’s omnipotence, that faith is pure willingness, but a willingness which the almighty God has created through the Word of truth, Stoeckhardt concludes by saying: “The more thoroughly and the deeper we Christians recognize our own natural depravity and our congenital moral ruin, the better we shall learn to understand and to evaluate the sublime, superior, all-conquering might and power of God which has victoriously overcome our resistance, given us saving faith, and still preserves us in this faith” (106).

Lenski’s translation of the verse under discussion reads much the same as that of Stoeckhardt: “So that you get to know what is. . .the exceeding greatness of his power for us believing ones in accord with the working of the strength of his might, which he wrought in the Christ” (Lenski 395). But it carefully avoids any wording which might suggest that faith is the result of the working of God’s power. It recognizes that this “greatness of God’s power” is operative “for us believing ones,” but makes the following (what God has wrought in Christ) the measure of that power. What God does for the believer is in keeping with (“in accord with”) the power that He has shown in the resurrection of Christ.

While the technical points of New Testament grammar that Lenski advances in support of his translation certainly deserve serious consideration, they still do not seem conclusive against the naturalness and simplicity of Stoeckhardt’s version.¹ But our chief concern is about Lenski’s doctrinal objections. Writing some twenty years after the death of the former, Lenski draws up a scathing indictment of his theology. Referring to the sections quoted above, he writes:

The cause of faith is the power of grace in the Gospel; to make *Allmacht, Allgewalt*, omnipotence, the cause is the opposite of Scripture teaching. This wrong conception is even carried to the extreme claim that “the greatest triumph of the divine almightiness” is said to crush “the intensest exercise of their (men’s) power” in resisting God. This is the irresistibility of Calvinism. Then, why does God use this all-crushing omnipotence upon only so few? [. . .] To escape this plain Calvinism it is assumed that there are two kinds of *Allgewalt*, one that may, and one that may not be resisted. The Bible knows only the latter; the other does not exist. (Lenski 398-99)

A similar passage will be found in the same work. We need quote only a few lines. Speaking of the power which quickens the spiritually dead and fills them with spiritual life, Lenski continues:

This is the power of God's love and grace (2, 8), operating in the Gospel (Rom. 1, 16). Omnipotence does not work in the spiritual domain, which is a Calvinistic idea; love and grace operate in this domain. These have their own "power," which in their domain is as great as omnipotence is in its domain. Confounding the two, because "power" is used with reference to the latter, misreads the Scripture statements. (500)

This is indeed quite a broadside. And while Lenski does not say in so many words whom he means, his direct quotes from Stoeckhardt are enough to identify his target.² Such a charge is certainly not to be taken lightly, and we who hold to Stoeckhardt's position need to be very sure of our ground. To teach the irresistibility of Calvinism in regard to conversion would indeed be a most grievous kind of error. But let us test these conclusions of Lenski.

Lenski is certainly not to be faulted for what he says about the greatness of the power of grace, the power of God's love, or for that matter the power of the Gospel. We know that the Gospel is a power (Rom. 1:16). We know that God's love, the Savior's love, is a mighty magnet. For we love Him because He first loved us. And it is the power that moved God to send His only begotten Son into the world (1 John 4:9). We know and rejoice in the power of grace, for it is by grace that we are saved (Eph. 2:5 and 8). Note how these terms enrich each other, "power" telling us something about the greatness and effectiveness of grace and love, while "grace" and "love" express the qualities of this power that is operating in the Gospel. These are indeed terms that are appropriate to the spiritual domain. For it is God's love and grace, even as it is God's power, that works in and through them. In no sense do these terms exclude each other. They simply present different aspects of the mighty working of God.

But why then exclude that power that we call omnipotence? Why rule this out when we are speaking of the creation of faith in the heart of the believer? Our God is One. All power is at His command. The difference lies not in the existence of several different kinds of power, one of which would be right and the other wrong for a given purpose. The difference lies rather in the use to which that power is put. At one time it was to create heaven and earth, at another to cleanse that earth by means of a Flood; once it was to deliver His people from hopeless bondage while at the same time breaking the power of the oppressor. It was used to bring about that tender miracle of which Isaiah spoke, that a virgin should conceive and bring forth a Son, and it was used again to raise that Son from the dead. It caused the miracle of tongues on Pentecost, as well as the greater miracle of the building and preserving of the New Testament Church. Sometimes it served the interests of justice, sometimes those of love and mercy; sometimes in the realm of material things, sometimes the spiritual. But it was always the same power, the power of the One God.

Then why not admit the use and grant the propriety of speaking of the omnipotence of God when we discuss the doctrine of conversion? Are there not great and mighty foes that need to be overcome there also? Foes so great that they can be overcome only by a power that is all-mighty? Is not the working of faith a creative miracle of God? Scripture is very free in the use of such expressions that magnify just this thought. In addition to the Ephesians passage under discussion, Paul speaks of the quickening of those who were dead in trespasses and sins (2:1 and 5), our being raised with Christ (v. 6), our being His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works (v. 10). We read of the God who does these things for us as one who is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (3:21). Or note II Corinthians 13:4: "We shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." Now, if Scripture uses these terms so freely, without in any way ruling out the idea of omnipotence, if it does so also in the spiritual domain of faith, then certainly no one should be branded with the stigma of Calvinism for speaking as did Stoeckhardt.

When Lenski raises the specter of Calvinistic irresistibility, he seems to forget one important fact, that it is God who wields the power of which we speak. Indeed, if men had such unlimited power at their command, there would be every reason to fear the use they would make of it. Then unjust coercion would be the rule and arbitrary violence would reign. It would be used for selfish ends, ends that would be ruthlessly pursued. But not so with the power that is in God's hands. He can coerce indeed, when coercion is called for. Pharaoh experienced that. But in the conversion of man He does not. Scripture tells

us that. Therefore it is utterly presumptuous to ask—as Lenski rather tauntingly does—why then God uses His omnipotence upon only so few.

The prayer of Paul quoted in the beginning of this discussion applies also to us, that the eyes of our understanding be enlightened, that we may know (in addition to the other blessings mentioned before) what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward. Let the power of God be magnified rather than diminished, for our need for it is so great. The foes that confront us are so overpoweringly strong. The situation in which we find ourselves is so desperate. Our strength is not only inadequate, but non-existent. What a glorious thing, then, to know that God’s power, His almighty power, has been and is being employed in our behalf. No child that is sure of the love of its father will be troubled over the great strength that he may have—even though to the child it may indeed be “irresistible.” On the contrary, he will be very proud, sure that this impressive strength will be used for his protection, not coercion. So with the Christian and his God. To know this is to be strengthened in our faith and in the assurance given by our Savior concerning His flock: “They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29).

Let us in closing recall what has been quoted from Stoeckhardt on an earlier page: “The more thoroughly and the deeper we Christians recognize our own natural depravity and our congenital moral ruin, the better we shall learn to understand and to evaluate the sublime, superior, all-conquering might and power of God which has victoriously overcome our resistance, given us saving faith, and still preserves us in this faith” (106). How can it better be said?

Endnotes

¹ Our original intention was to forgo any further discussion of this question lest this divert attention from the following theological issue, which was our main concern, or obscure it by the technical nature of the discussion. Lest too many questions be left unanswered, however, we have decided to make this particular matter the subject of a future article.

² Seeming differences are explained by the fact that while we are quoting the Sommer translation, Lenski was doing his own from the German of Stoeckhardt.

Ephesians 1:19 Text and Context

Edmund Reim

In our previous issue, while discussing the sharp difference between Stoeckhardt and Lenski in their respective interpretations of Ephesians 1:19, we confined ourselves almost entirely to the theological aspects of this difference. Only in passing did we say: “While the technical points of New Testament grammar that Lenski advances in support of his translation certainly deserve serious consideration, they still do not seem conclusive against the naturalness and simplicity of Stoeckhardt’s version.” Then we moved on to what was our chief concern, Lenski’s doctrinal objections. In a footnote we promised, however, to make this particular matter of New Testament grammar the subject of a future article, “lest too many questions be left unanswered” (JoT, Oct. 1961, p. 4).

Our readers may remember that Stoeckhardt connects the reference to “the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward” directly with the next words, “according to the working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ. . . .” The point he makes is that our believing is the result of this “working of the strength of His might.” Lenski’s objection is very terse and seems quite conclusive. It raises two points. First he states quite categorically that “the combination πιστεύειν κατά is never found; κατά never modifies this verb.” And then he adds with equal positiveness: “The long elaboration introduced by this preposition could not possibly modify the incidental participle attached to ἡμᾶς” (Lenski 398).

Lenski is probably right when he says that this particular combination is never found. One would not look for it in the profane literature of the Greeks, for the entire concept of “believing” in the scriptural

sense of that word was foreign to them. So one would hardly look to them for evidence that would be relevant to our question. To the best of our knowledge Lenski is also right with reference to the New Testament. The combination of those two terms “believing” and “according to” is indeed an unusual one. The example before us, if the words do belong together, may well be the only one of its kind. But does that warrant Lenski’s conclusion? The New Testament has many *hapax legomena*, words that occur only once. Though the term μεριστής, divider, appears nowhere else in the New Testament and only rarely in contemporary Greek literature, it does appear in the reply of Jesus to the man who wanted Him to speak to his brother, that the brother divide the inheritance with him (Luke 12:14). It was the fitting word for that occasion, so Scripture has it. Other examples of this kind could be cited at length.

It must be granted, of course, that this one-time use of an unusual word is not a true parallel to the case in point, to the argument of Lenski. For in this case it is not the word or the words that are unusual, but the connection of the one with the other, πιστεύειν with κατά. But the point should be quite obvious. It is not enough for Lenski simply to make the sweeping assertion that our particular combination “is never found.” He owes his readers proof that it could not properly have been said, that it is an impossible combination. For otherwise there can always be a first time. It would certainly be entirely in keeping with the literary ability and originality of Paul—the Apostle who was at the same time under the inspiration of the Spirit—to break through the bounds of precedent and the shackles of the conventional and to create a new way of saying something, provided it would still serve the purpose of all speech and writing, namely, to communicate a given thought in clearly recognizable form. But Lenski has done nothing more than make a bare assertion about this particular combination of two words—in a most dogmatic manner, it is true—but without offering a shred of proof beyond the mere claim that it was not said that way before. Does that prove that it then could never be said?

We believe that, given the occasion to express such a thought, it could be said in precisely that form. And we shall try to prove it, not indeed by suddenly producing a previously overlooked quotation which would furnish the precedent, but by showing that the simple meaning of the words permits the very expression to which Lenski so vigorously objects.

Let us begin with the κατά. One of the basic and clearly established uses of this versatile preposition is to indicate norm, similarity, homogeneity. In such cases it is translated with “according to” or similar expressions, implying a standard by which something is governed or according to which it is judged. But in this very connection one of the most modern dictionaries of the New Testament goes on to say: “Often the norm is at the same time the reason, so that *in accordance with* and *because of* are merged. . . . The meaning ‘in accordance with’ can also disappear entirely, so that κατά means simply *because of, as a result of, on the basis of*” (Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich 408). Noting particularly the definitions which we have underlined above, it should be clear that if the Apostle wished to assure his Christians at Ephesus that their faith was the result of that “working of the strength of His might,” or that this power of God was the cause of their faith, there was certainly nothing in the definitions of the preposition to prevent his combining it with “believe” and thus putting those two words together into a meaningful expression, even though it may never have been done before. Whether that is indeed what the Apostle wanted to say is another question, one to which we shall presently return.

But before we do that, we must face Lenski’s second objection, namely, that what he calls an “incidental participle” (“the believing ones”) could not possibly bear the weight of what follows in the rest of that admittedly massive clause. That πιστεύοντες is a participle is obvious. But is it “incidental”? Let the context decide!

The first half of the first chapter in Ephesians is a magnificent doxology to the Triune God “who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (v. 3). Beginning with verse 15 Paul then launches into a fervent prayer for his beloved Ephesians: that God may give them something (v. 17) and that they may know something (v. 18). The gifts are threefold: the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him—a knowledge that is by revelation and which is therefore true wisdom. A fourth gift sums up the previous three: “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened,” literally, that He may give you enlightened eyes of your heart.

But Paul has a purpose in mind for these gifts, particularly for those “enlightened eyes.” This purpose is plainly stated, “that ye may know,” and again covers three major points. We believe that the very form of the arrangement will demonstrate that Paul is building toward a climax:

That ye may know

- 1) what is the hope of His calling,
- 2) and what [are] the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
- 3) and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ. . . [Eph. 1:18-20].

Stoekhardt discusses each of these at some length. He describes the glory of a hope that is based on the fact that God has called us, the same God of whom it was stated in verse 4 of this chapter that He “hath chosen us in Christ before the foundations of the world.” He describes the splendor of that inheritance that awaits the Christian, one which the Apostle in another letter (Col. 1:12) calls “the inheritance of the saints in light.” He enlarges on the wonderful comfort that the Apostle offers the believer, namely, that the secure possession of all these blessings that are and can be received only by faith does not depend on our own strength and ability, but is assured to us by “the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe.” Here is the climax. And when Stoekhardt then takes the next words as an explanation of how the believer comes to faith and is preserved in faith, namely, “by the working of His mighty power,” he is simply letting these words serve their natural and normal function of unfolding the full implications of that mighty climax that has there been reached.

Lenski is fully aware of this same progression, and states it beautifully: “The three indirect questions constitute a unit, and they form a pyramid. From the hope in our hearts Paul looks up to the object of that hope, the heavenly inheritance, and then he looks up still farther, to the divine power which guarantees this inheritance to us. All of this is to move fully into the range of our vision and our knowledge” (Lenski 395, emph. Reim). But by stopping where he does he excludes the vital “to us-ward who believe” from this climax, and does so in spite of the way in which the entire trend of Paul’s thought is built up to this very point. To treat this expression as an “incidental participle” (398), one that is “merely added for the purpose of elucidation” (397) is to turn a mighty climax into a feeble anti-climax. It surely seems that by being so completely preoccupied with the grammatical form of the participle Lenski has lost sight of the marvelous content of that precious word which, with all its “incidental” form, is nevertheless employed to express the weighty and momentous thought of faith—saving faith, that faith of which the Apostle has written such wonderful things but a few verses back: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13-14).

We therefore maintain that when the force of this climax is recognized, it not only permits that the next words (“according to the working of His mighty power”) be directly attached to the participle (“the believing ones”) but actually demands it. For the flow of words can simply not be interrupted at that point without doing violence to the great thought that the Apostle is expressing for the comfort of all believers, namely, that we shall know that the faith on which so much depends is not something that rests on our feeble power. It is a gift that we owe equally to the grace and to the mighty power of God. In His infinite grace He has not only created this faith in the first place, but also preserved it until now, even as it is He alone who also preserves it to the end—and that by the same power by which in Christ He wrought the great work of our redemption.

This clearly demonstrable trend of thought is the reason why we also maintain that what we treated as a hypothetical assumption on a previous page should be accepted as actual fact. There we said that if the Apostle wished to assure his Christians at Ephesus that their faith was the result of that “working of the strength of His might,” or that this power of God was the cause of their faith, there was nothing in the definition of the preposition to prevent that. Now we say that this is indeed what the Apostle wanted to do and say. For the theology of this interpretation see our article in the previous issue of our journal.

A Tribute to Walther

C. M. Gullerud

Before we close this year of 1961, it would ill become us if we were to pass over in silence the sesquicentennial anniversary of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's birth. As we are wont to thank God for the gift He gave to His Church in the person of Dr. Martin Luther, so we lift up our hearts in gratitude to God for having granted His Church the gift of a man like Dr. Walther. If this is to mean anything, however, then we should be dedicating ourselves to the same orthodox and Scripturally sound principles for which he contended. Any student of Dr. Walther's writings will know that he did not presume to have discovered a more scholarly and contemporaneous method of studying the Scriptures. He did not depreciate nor did he traditionalize the work of the Fathers, but he used and cited their writings as a testimony of their faithfulness to the Scriptures and as a reminder of the value that their witness had and will have for the Church of all ages. This was a man who walked in the Scriptures and he expected men to follow him only as he spoke "as an oracle of God" (I Peter 4:11). It is one thing to use Dr. Walther only when we find that he agrees with us, and it is quite another thing to quote him because we find that he is scrupulously faithful to the Word of God. It can be said as a sure thing that Dr. Walther did not wish to be honored for a leadership resulting in a large organization while the things for which he stood are being chipped away one by one. Dr. Walther as a Christian theologian does not belong to any organization, but he belongs to the Church and specifically to those who give him the honor his memory deserves.

It was a delight to read the article entitled "Walther and the Scriptures," presented by Robert D. Preus in the November issue of *Concordia Theological Monthly*. This is Walther as we have learned to know him in his writings. It is a true picture of the man who became known as a champion of the inspiration, the authority, and the inerrancy of the Scriptures. It is a true picture of the man because it is drawn from his writings, all of which breathe a humble submission to and acceptance of every Word of Holy Scripture. There was no sign of compromise with those who came with their "scholarly" insistence that the human side of Scripture must be borne in mind, i.e., when portions dealing with history, geography, and science are being studied. There was no hesitancy in saying that the Bible presented truth and fact even when it spoke of such matters which did not involve the acts of God. He did not distinguish between verbs and nouns in speaking of the inerrancy of Scripture. Dr. Walther was not ashamed to be aligned with a Quenstedt when he [Walther quoting Quenstedt] said:

The holy canonical Scriptures in their original text are the infallible truth and free from every error. That is to say, in the sacred canonical Scriptures there is no lie, no deceit, no error, even the slightest, either in content or in words, but every single word handed down in the Scriptures is most true, whether it pertains to doctrine, ethics, history, chronology, topography, or onomastics; and no ignorance, lack of understanding, forgetfulness, or lapse of memory, can or should be attributed to the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit in their writing of the Holy Scriptures. [qtd. in Preus 686]

Surely it would be dishonor to the memory of a Walther to say that in all this insistence on the absolute inerrancy of Scripture he failed to magnify the truth which God delivered through the holy men of God who penned the Scriptures. In fact, by his insistence on the verbal inspiration of the Bible and its absolute inerrancy he let Scripture be Scripture and preserved for the common Christian the clarity and authority of Scripture and issued a declaration of independence from the so-called "higher scholarship" and "scientific exegesis." In all of these matters the aforementioned article in the *C. T. M.* has been true to the memory of Dr. Walther.

It would be good if we could leave the subject with these remarks, but honesty demands that a further testimony be given regarding the aberrations of some who even in these days be-speak a veneration for the man whose birthday anniversary is being observed. Without going into great detail we express our amazement that the writer of the *C. T. M.* article (who has so well captured the spirit of Walther) could now accept a call to be colleague of one who has departed from Scripturally sound principles reproduced so well in the tribute, "Walther and the Scriptures." It is no secret that Dr. Martin Scharlemann of Concordia Seminary has been quite ready to say that the old-time understanding of the

inerrancy of Scripture must be discarded in view of his allegation that the writers in imparting historical and natural information did not always present a factual and precise report. He holds that the writers at times made use of folk tales and traditional stories which were not in all instances factually correct. This is where he claims we must take into consideration the human side of the Scriptures in order that we may preserve and magnify the truth that comes by divine revelation. It would appear that, having found these alleged errors, he does not wish to attribute them to God, and so the difficulty is to be solved by stressing a “human side” of the Scriptures which allows for such errors. Walther said: “For if I believe that the Bible also contains errors, then it is no longer a touchstone for me, but needs a touchstone itself. In short, it is unspeakable what the devil tries with the ‘divine-human Scripture’” [qtd. in Preus 674].

Dr. Preus in his article says:

The old heresies which Walther opposed in his day are still being advanced. Present neo-orthodoxy is saying something about Scripture and revelation quite like what those old positive theologians said. In a very true sense the neo-orthodox theologians today are reprobation theologians; they are not very original. In opposing this theology we will find Walther can be of great help to us. He faced many of the same problems we face. And he manifested a firm confidence in the God of Scripture, a confident spirit which will serve as a mighty example to us all when we become confused or hesitant in confessing the truth. Today we must speak forthrightly as he spoke. For nothing has happened, nothing can happen, to make us change our stand on the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. [691]

The writer of “Walther and the Scriptures” should have pointed out that principles defended in this article are being vitiated by Dr. Scharlemann. This would have been a Waltherian forthrightness called for by the present situation. But then, of course, the article would not have been printed in the *C. T. M.* But a public statement to this effect would make it clear that Dr. Preus does not hold with the views of a Scharlemann. As it now appears, such an article as “Walther and the Scriptures” is permitted to stand in the same stall with Scharlemann’s “The Bible as Record, Witness and Medium,” which has not been retracted.

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A Study of Select Passages from the NIV 2011

Mark Tiefel

2 Peter 1:20-21: *Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (NIV 2011).

In 1973 Zondervan Publishing House came out with the *New International Version* (NIV) initially as a translation of the New Testament based on the Nestle-Aland text. By 1978 the NIV translation covered the Old Testament too. Since that time several revisions and editions have been

released. The most familiar in use today is the edition published in 1984. It is the edition used by several of our pastors and laymen as well as many other Christians around the globe. In recent years the NIV has surpassed the King James Version as the best-selling English Bible in America.

In 2002 Zondervan produced a translation of the NIV intended to succeed the 1984 edition. It was given the title *Today's New International Version* (TNIV). The TNIV included many significant changes from the 1984 edition, most noteworthy of which was the introduction of gender-inclusive language. TNIV translators sought to provide an edition of the NIV that would answer the growing and false accusations that the Bible was a misogynistic book. However, as one writer put it, "The gender-neutral approach of the TNIV (*Today's New International Version*) in 2002 and 2005 became such a lightning-rod that the version never caught on with American evangelicals. . . ."¹

Though the publishers at Zondervan tried another TNIV edition in 2005, it suffered from the same problems and has since been discontinued. These developments have led to the 2011 edition of the NIV. It is important to remember that the NIV 2011 is most similar to the TNIV text, not the 1984 text. Therefore one must critically ask whether the right changes and enough changes have been made to make this a commendable edition. That being said, the following review is not intended to force an opinion of translations upon our readers. Instead, it offers expanded information and some commentary on the translation of key passages as these occur in the recent editions of the New International Version.²

Gender-inclusive Language

Note: The use of gender-inclusive language in recent translations is defended in the name of making it clear that females are not excluded in the application of God's promises. This approach has been taken with the conviction that the majority of people today do not understand words like "man" or "mankind" in a generic way. In the review of the following passages such concerns are not at issue. The focus below is rather on the impact gender-inclusive language could have on what Scripture says regarding the role of women in the church.

▪ 1 Timothy 2:12

NIV 1984: I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

TNIV 2002: I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be quiet.

TNIV 2005: I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

NIV 2011: I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

Nestle-Aland: διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ ἀυθεντεῖν ἀνδρός, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ.³

According to many this is the most contested verse in the NIV 2011. The main crux is in the change made from "have authority" to "assume authority." Those on the side of "assume authority" argue that ἀυθεντεῖν should be understood in a "negative connotation,"⁴ that is, that Paul was speaking about a specific type of domination or usurping of authority. Under this assumption Paul would only be prohibiting a woman from a certain kind of domineering or a power-grab type of teaching over men, not necessarily a prohibition against teaching men as a called servant of the church.

Those on the side of "have authority" state that Paul is prohibiting women from teaching men and from exercising authority over a man in all areas of church work. The translators of the new edition defend their translation by stating that it allows for both interpretations. Of course, this would give apparent support for those who feel that women may teach over men, so long as it is done in an orderly fashion.

A closer look at some lexicons on ἀυθεντεῖν seems to show that either translation of the word is viable:

Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich (BDAG): To assume a stance of independent authority, *give orders to, dictate to* (with gen. of person);⁵

Friberg: Strictly, of one who acts on his own authority; hence *have control over, domineer, lord it over*;

Liddell-Scott (L-S): *To have full power over*;

Louw-Nida (L-N): To control in a domineering manner, *control, domineer*;

UBS: *Domineer, have authority over*.

We know, however, that Scripture interprets Scripture. Therefore when lexicon information appears to support either side, we must look at what the rest of God's Word tells us. When considering the two passages below, it seems that "have authority" is the better choice of translation in 1 Timothy 2:12.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35: The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (ESV).

1 Corinthians 11:3: But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (ESV).⁶

▪ **1 Corinthians 14:33-34**

NIV 1984: (note paragraphing)

³³For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.

TNIV 2005: (note paragraphing)

³³For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.

³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.

NIV 2011: (note paragraphing)

³³For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.

³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.

Nestle-Aland: οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀκαταστασίας ὁ θεὸς ἀλλὰ εἰρήνης. Ὡς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἁγίων 34 αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις σιγάτωσαν· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπεται αὐταῖς λαλεῖν, ἀλλὰ ὑποτασσέσθωσαν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει.

It seems fitting to examine this passage next since it is closely related to the previous. Through the formatting of the translations above I hope to convey the main issue with these verses. Both the TNIV and the NIV of 2011 start a new paragraph after verse 33, thereby separating the thoughts of the two verses. The 1984 edition separates the verses with a comma and connects the last clause of verse 33 with verse 34.

The noted break in thought is disconcerting to some because it opens the door to a possible interpretation that Paul was only addressing a local issue in the Corinthian congregation, not necessarily something to be followed by all congregations in all areas. Since ἐκκλησίαις is found in both verses, it seems best to keep the two thoughts together, especially since it is unlikely from the context that Paul was speaking to or about two different groups.

As with the previous passage, we need to be alert to a possible watering down of the Spirit's message so as to support a feminist or egalitarian agenda. This was the main issue with the TNIV and it is not changed in the first two passages considered so far.

▪ **Romans 16:1**

NIV 1984: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea.

TNIV 2005: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.

NIV 2011: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.

Nestle-Aland: Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν οὖσαν [καὶ] διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς,

The translation of this passage has alarmed several churches where male deacons have a governing role in the church. To my knowledge very few CLC churches use the term *deacon* for an office or position of authority. Outside of our fellowship, however, a number of Christian churches use the term with an authoritative sense, and so the question must be asked: Was Phoebe a deacon in the early church and was this position one of authority over men? The Greek word *διάκονος* has a number of definitions given in the lexicon listings below.

BDAG: 1. One who serves as an intermediary in a transaction, *agent, intermediary, courier*; 2. One who gets something done, at the behest of a superior, *assistant, attendant, aide*;

Friberg: 1. Generally of a person who renders helpful service, *servant, helper*; 2. As an official in the church, *deacon*, both masculine and feminine;

L-S: *A servant, waiting man, Lat. Minister*; 2. *A minister of the church, a deacon, fem. a deaconess*;

L-N: A person who renders service – *servant*; 2. One who serves as a deacon, with responsibility to care for the needs of believers, *deacon, one who helps the believers*;

UBS: Both masc. and fem. *servant; helper, minister; deacon; deaconess*.

The historical situation of the early Christian church must be remembered when considering the sense of this verse. Did the church at Paul's time have an official position called a "deacon," or did they simply recognize the individual as a servant, in line with what the root of the word means? "Deacon" seems to be an English word based on a transliteration of the Greek word *διάκονος*. In my opinion it's very likely that the early church's perception of a deacon was quite different than the usage and understanding that certain churches have given it today.

In all, the NIV only translates *διάκονος* as "deacon" four times out of 29 occurrences.⁷ It would seem that the most likely meaning of the word should be "servant" unless the context warrants otherwise. What adds more fuel to this discussion is Paul's use of "deacon" in 1 Timothy 3:12: "Let deacons (*διάκονοι*) each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well" (ESV).⁸ Other qualifications are also listed for deacons in this section of 1 Timothy—each of which would indicate a position to be held by a man, not a woman, as verse 12 itself clearly shows. It seems, therefore, that the translation of "deacon" in Romans 16:1 would lead to more confusion for our members. Caution is in order so that we do not recommend the translation of a passage that might imply support of a false teaching. Such caution is needed when many outside of our fellowship are using questionable translations to support their false doctrine and practice.

▪ **Romans 16:7**

NIV 1984: Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

TNIV 2005: Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

NIV 2011: Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

Nestle-Aland: ἀσπάσασθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ Ἰουνιᾶν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου, οἵτινες εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, οἳ καὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ.

ESV: Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

There seems to be two main issues with the translating of this verse. The first is the change from “Junias” (male) in the 1984 edition to “Junia” (female) in the TNIV and the NIV of 2011. If the name was in fact feminine, it would apparently support the claim of some that there were female apostles during Paul’s time. According to those who make this claim, recent scholarship has shown that evidence of a male name Junias in the first century does not exist.⁹

I was not able to research what was claimed in the cited source, but in the lexicons readily available each listed the form of Ἰουνιάς as masculine.¹⁰ At best it seems that both sides can present evidence for their argument.¹¹ That being said, however, the second question or issue with this verse appears to be more pertinent.

In addition to the debate previously mentioned, questions also arise with the words ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις. Do these words tell us that Andronicus and Junia(s) were actually apostles, or were they simply well known to the apostles? Since all three NIV editions translate it the same (“They are outstanding among the apostles”), I have included the English Standard Version above (ESV) to represent the difference. Regarding the usage of ἐπίσημοι, lexicons give the following information:

BDAG: Of exceptional quality, *splendid, prominent, outstanding*;

Friberg: In a positive sense *outstanding, well-known*;

L-S: *Having a mark on it, of money, stamped, coined, 2. Notable, remarkable*;

L-N: Pertaining to being well-known or outstanding, either because of positive or negative characteristics, *outstanding, famous, notorious, infamous*;

UBS: *Well-known, outstanding; notorious*.

One must also look at the modifying prepositional phrase and the way that ἐν is used in this verse. Is “among” the best way to translate, or would the basic sense of “in connection with” be more suitable in this context? Also, is the basic sense of “messenger” perhaps more fitting for this occurrence of ἀποστόλοις? These matters all need to be weighed in the light of the rest of Scripture.

Given the many questions with this verse, one would need to assume quite a bit about the text in order to read the Greek word as Ἰουνίαν, translate it as “Junia,” and regard this person as a female apostle.

The four passages considered above represent the growing concern that many conservative Christians have with the NIV of 2011, namely, that it supports feminist and egalitarian groups who support false teachings about the roles of men and women in the church. Based on my brief study, I share the same concerns. I would hesitate to endorse a translation that includes specific changes which others use to support false doctrine, especially when these changes have arisen in our recent era of political correctness. That being said, other translations of the Bible suffer from poor choices made by the translators, and each has been used and quoted by false teachers to support views that contradict the true Word of God. Regardless of whether or not we choose to support or use the new NIV as pastors and teachers, we recognize the need to educate our members on the dangers of passages such as these, which deal with or have some bearing on gender roles in the church.

Doctrinal Difficulties

- **Psalm 8:4-6** (Note: Underlined words below indicate a focus of difference between the NIV of 2011 and previous NIV editions.)

NIV 1984: What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.

TNIV 2005: What are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.

NIV 2011: What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.

The strange thing about this passage in the NIV 2011 is that it seems to translate the same verse in two different ways. The writer of Hebrews records this Old Testament passage in chapter two of his letter, Hebrews 2:6-8:

NIV 2011: But there is a place where someone has testified: “What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.”

NIV 1984: But there is a place where someone has testified: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.”

If the writer of Hebrews is actually quoting Psalm 8:4, which seems very likely, why translate it differently, especially with respect to the words “son of man”? What also adds confusion is the mixture of singular and plural pronouns to describe the same person. A quick look at the Hebrew text reveals that the 3rd masculine singular pronoun and the 3rd masculine singular suffix are used throughout, and therefore both passages in Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 are referring to one individual.

Psalm 8:4: מַה־אָנוֹשׁ “What is man?” (masc. singular)

כִּי־תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ “that you are mindful of him” (3rd masc. sg. suffix)

וּבֶן־אָדָם “and the son of man” (both masc. sg.)

כִּי חֲפָקֶנּוּ “that you care for him” (3rd masc. sg. suffix)

Psalm 8:5: וַתַּחַסְרֶהוּ “and You have made him lower” (3rd masc. sg. suffix)

תַּעֲטִרֶהוּ “You have crowned him” (3rd masc. sg. suffix)

Psalm 8:6: תִּמְשֵׁלֵהוּ “You have made him to rule” (3rd masc. sg. suffix)

תַּחַת־רַגְלָיו “under his feet” (3rd masc. sg. suffix)

To break up the uniform use of pronouns in these verses, as the TNIV and the NIV of 2011 do, creates confusion in the mind of the reader. In addition, what is more compelling in this argument is the context in which the writer of Hebrews places his quotation of Psalm 8:4-6. In verse 9 he clearly connects the “son of man” from Psalm 8 to Jesus:

Hebrews 2:9: But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone (ESV).

One cannot simply ignore the fact that through His incarnation Jesus humbled Himself beneath the angels when as a man He took on human form, human flesh. And since this verse comes on the heels of the Psalm 8 quotation, it is clear that Psalm 8:4-6 must be an Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah, with specific reference to His incarnation. What adds even more weight to this sense is how ἡλαττωμένον (literally “he who has been made lower”), the masculine singular participle in Hebrews 2:9, is used to describe Jesus.¹² Again, just as the string of masculine singular pronouns connect the thoughts of Psalm 8:4-6 together, so the masculine singular forms in Hebrews 2:9 connect Jesus to Psalm 8:4-6.

When one considers everything contained in both sections, the power of Scripture interpreting Scripture shines forth and points the way for the Bible reader to understand what the Spirit meant. And yet it seems as if the translators of the TNIV and the NIV of 2011 ignore that principle, as well as the clear forms of the Hebrew, in favor of gender-inclusive language. This is extremely perplexing in a section that prophesies and speaks of Christ.

▪ Habakkuk 2:4

NIV 1984: “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith.”

TNIV 2005: “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by their faithfulness.”

NIV 2011: “See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness.”

The danger in translating this passage with “faithfulness” is that it points to the individual’s strength and will. Living by faith and living by faithfulness are very different concepts. This passage has long been one of the stalwarts used to support the Lutheran tenet of *faith alone*. If, however, “faith” becomes replaced with “faithfulness,” then the strength of this passage is significantly weakened; and the false teaching of our cooperation in the creation and preservation of our faith is potentially encouraged.

Although “faithfulness” is a possible translation according to lexicons (בְּאֵמוּנָהוּ), we also need to remember that Paul quotes this passage in his letter to the Romans:

Romans 1:17: For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” (NIV 2011).

In the Greek of this passage Paul uses πίστεις, which in this context conveys the meaning of “faith.” Furthermore, we know from Paul’s entire discussion about faith in the book of Romans that he does *not* point to any power or faithfulness in the individual. We must ask a similar question that was raised with the previous passage. If Paul is indeed quoting Habakkuk 2:4, why does the NIV of 2011 provide two different translations of the same statement? This is especially puzzling, since the two translations of the same word can be understood in very different ways. Again, a study of this passage shows the importance of using Scripture to interpret Scripture and deciding how to translate accordingly.

▪ Zechariah 9:9

NIV 1984: Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

TNIV 2005: Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

NIV 2011: Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

This prophecy of Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is certainly a well-beloved passage from the Old Testament. The question I have with this verse is the change from “having salvation” to “victorious.” The key Hebrew word, a Niphal form of עָשָׂה, is related to the root of the name Jesus (*Yeshua* in Aramaic). On the specific form the lexicons provide the following definitions:

Brown-Driver-Briggs: In Niphal 1. *be liberated, saved* (prop. *placed in freedom*). . . ; 2. *Be saved in battle, victorious*;

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament: *Be saved, be delivered* (Niphal); *save, deliver, give victory, help; be safe; take vengeance, preserve* (Hiphil).

The reason why this change is disconcerting for me is that it seems to take away from the meaning of עָשָׂה. To me the Hebrew verb form is a rich term that encompasses the gospel message, how Christ has saved us from all enemies, both physical and spiritual. “Victorious” seems to focus more on the power and omnipotence of Jesus rather than His saving love. As with other passages considered in this review, I see how the updated translation can fit, but I fail to understand the need to change what the 1984 edition had. As pastors and teachers we must ask ourselves: Is it better to introduce a term that may be more familiar to our readers, but takes away from the rich meaning of the original language? Or is it better to take additional strides to educate our listeners, young and old, about the meanings of words that may be less familiar, but convey important images and concepts expressed in the original language? Some words that come to mind in this category are salvation, justification, atonement, righteousness, reconciliation, redemption, to name a few.

▪ **Galatians 1:6**

NIV 1984: I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

TNIV 2005: I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

NIV 2011: I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Nestle-Aland: Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον.

Though the difference in these passages may seem slight, I feel that they represent a growing trend of churches today to emphasize sanctification over justification. While the new NIV translation, “called you to live in the grace of Christ,” can be understood correctly, it can also place or suggest some emphasis on the call of believers to be an act of the Christian living in the grace of Christ. But the proper focus of this verse should be the very grace of Christ, not the believer’s action of living, especially in the book of Galatians with its prominent theme of grace alone through faith alone as the certainty of one’s salvation.

It is my opinion that Paul uses the preposition ἐν to show the means by which the call took place, namely, that the grace of Christ had made the call to faith effective. I feel that the new NIV translation places, at least potentially, undue emphasis on the believer’s sanctified life and downplays the work of the Holy Spirit. We as believers are passive recipients in the call to faith, and it’s only by the grace of Christ and the power of the Spirit at work that our faith comes to be. It too is the free gift of God’s love, a reality that falls in line with the very purpose and meaning of grace.

▪ **Colossians 3:16**

NIV 1984: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

TNIV 2005: Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

NIV 2011: Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Nest.-Aland: ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες ἑαυτοὺς, ψαλμοῖς ὕμνοις ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς ἐν [τῇ] χάριτι ᾄδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ·

This is probably a rather minor difference, but I feel it represents a majority of the translation changes made in the NIV of 2011. Changing the beginning of the passage to “Let the message of Christ dwell...” may seem to convey the same idea as “Let the word of Christ dwell...,” but I believe that an important nuance of the Greek is thereby left out, particularly with respect to John 1. We know Jesus Christ as the “Word” (λόγος). For me and many other Christians this expression brings great comfort to our hearts by connecting Christ to every part of God’s Word. In fact, this connection between Christ and His Word is an important reason why we defend the authority of the Bible. I see no compelling reason to translate λόγος differently, especially in this passage. Yes, it can be properly understood in the way that

the TNIV and the new NIV translate, but I fail to see the reason for changing the translation of the 1984 edition.

▪ **Malachi 2:16**

NIV 1984: “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

TNIV 2005: “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, “and I hate it when people clothe themselves with injustice,” says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

NIV 2011: “The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

The main question in this verse centers around שׂנֵא (‘‘he hates’’), which is a 3rd masculine singular verb. This verb is difficult to understand because one must determine the subject and the object of the hating. Almost all translations render God (אֱלֹהִים) as the subject and divorce (חֲלָצָה) as the object. However, this understanding is difficult for some because the verb as a 3rd singular should be translated, ‘‘he hates.’’ But with God speaking directly here, one would expect a 1st singular verb, if indeed God is the subject. It seems likely that divorce is the object of the hating due to the word order of the verse.

While we can certainly understand why the new NIV attempts to introduce a 3rd person masculine subject into the sentence, we must admit that the translation goes too far in the inclusion of ‘‘wife’’ as the object of the hate. One could argue that the thought of a wife comes from the context of the previous verse (15),¹³ but that does not automatically place the wife as the direct object in this verse. This also does not explain the conjunction that is added in the clause: ‘‘The man who hates and divorces his wife. . . .’’ There is no such conjunction in the Hebrew text.

Also unclear is how the words, ‘‘does violence to the one he should protect,’’ fits with the Hebrew: וְכָסָה עַל-לְבוּשׁוֹ. A literal translation of this phrase is: ‘‘And he covers violently upon his garments.’’ Again the NIV of 2011 tries to point the object of this clause back to the wife, which I feel does not fit. Without question we can agree that the Hebrew of this verse is difficult to render in English. But the translation of the new NIV seems to have little support according to both the structure of the sentence and the context.

Since the LORD has been the main voice in this entire chapter, it seems strange that He would now imply a new subject in this verse. Perhaps a better way to understand this verse is given in the New King James Version, which reads:

‘‘For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,’’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘‘Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously’’ (Mal. 2:16).

With this translation the LORD is kept as the subject and divorce is kept as the direct object. The translation also correctly renders the 3rd masculine singular form שׂנֵא. The implications of changing the verse as the new NIV does are clear. It waters down God’s stance on divorce, leaving a faulty view that we would not want to promote.¹⁴

Grammatical Confusion

The following passages are examples of the confusion that may result from the interchanging of singular and plural pronouns. The reason the interchange has occurred is to create a more egalitarian or gender-inclusive translation—again, in the interest of not excluding anyone in the application of God’s proclamations. The 3rd masculine singular pronoun has been dropped in favor of common pronouns, most of which are plurals.¹⁵ In some places making the language more gender-neutral is a good thing,

especially with respect to objective or universal justification. However, I feel that the passages below provide examples where it can take away from the meaning and perhaps confuse the reader.

Matthew 10:37: “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Matthew 16:27: “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.”

Matthew 18:6: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

Mark 7:15: “Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”

John 11:25-26: Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

John 12:25: “Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Romans 2:6: God “will repay each person according to what they have done.”

Romans 4:5: However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Romans 14:12: So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

1 Corinthians 6:18: Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.

1 Corinthians 14:4: Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.¹⁶

Titus 3:10: Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.

Improvements

The following are some passages that I believe have been changed for the better. No doubt, other examples could be given that are not included in this listing. I have included the TNIV translation along with the newer 2011 translation, which has been indented and the notable change has been underlined.

▪ **John 7:31**

TNIV 2005: Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, “When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?”

NIV 2011: Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, “When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?”

▪ **John 8:30**

TNIV 2005: Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

NIV 2011: Even as he spoke, many believed in him.

▪ **John 11:45**

TNIV 2005: Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

NIV 2011: Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

▪ **John 12:36**

TNIV 2005: Put your trust in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

NIV 2011: Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.”
When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

▪ **Galatians 3:24**

TNIV 2005: So the law was put in charge of us until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

NIV 2011: So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

▪ **1 Timothy 2:5**

TNIV 2005: For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human.

NIV 2011: For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

It is my hope that this study will be useful for those who have questions about the NIV edition of 2011. However, this study is admittedly brief, and each pastor or teacher should look at the translation differences for himself so that he may be knowledgeable when approached with questions. In no way have I intended to force my opinions on others. Rather, my intent has been to provide information on certain passages in question, with the purpose of helping others in their own study of this new translation. As always, we make it our prayer that the LORD would continue to bless us as we use and preach His Word. May He also keep us faithful to the truth that He has given to us in His Word.

Online sources for more information

Full NIV Translation Notes: <http://www.biblegateway.com/niv/Translators-Notes.pdf>.

Committee on Bible Translation (CBT): <http://www.niv-cbt.org>.

Video from the chairman of the CBT: <http://www.biblegateway.com/niv/executive-summary/>

Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW): <http://www.cbmw.org>.

Journal analysis of NIV 2011 from CBMW (Denny Burk):

http://www.cbmw.org/images/articles_pdf/jbmw%20spring%20%5C%2711%2016.burk%20only.pdf.

Book review (B. Jeffries) from *Christians for Biblical Equality*:

<http://www.cbeinternational.org/files/u1/free-art/2011-NIV.pdf>.

Statistical website:

http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison/

Endnotes

¹ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “An Evaluation of Gender Language in the 2011 Edition of the NIV Bible.” (cbmw.org. June 2011) 5 Jan. 2012 <http://www.cbmw.org/images/articles_pdf/cbmw%20final%20analysis%20of%202011%20niv.pdf>.

² The writer, a senior at Immanuel Lutheran Seminary, originally prepared this review for a CLC pastoral study club that gathered in September of 2011. It is offered here with some revisions made by the editor.

³ All quotations of Greek text are taken from Nestle-Aland 27th edition.

⁴ Bridget Jack Jeffries, “Book Review: The 2011 NIV Bible,” *Priscilla Papers* 25.1 (2011) 27. 5 Jan. 2012 <<http://www.cbeinternational.org/files/u1/free-art/2011-NIV.pdf>>.

⁵ Lexicon information here provided conforms to these conventions: Definitions and explanatory information are given in regular font; glosses (translation equivalents) are given in italics or quotation marks.

⁶ Taking the Greek word *γυναικός* in a different way are these translations: “I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (NAS); “I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (NKJ).

⁷ Denny Burk, “The Translation of Gender Terminology in the NIV 2011,” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Spr. 2011) 24. 5 Jan. 2012

<http://www.cbmw.org/images/articles_pdf/jbmw%20spring%20%5C%2711%2016.burk%20only.pdf>.

⁸ NAS, NIV (1984 ed.), and NKJ also translate *διάκονοι* as “deacons” or “deacon” in 1 Timothy 3:12.

⁹ Bridget Jack Jeffries, “Book Review: The 2011 NIV Bible” 27.

¹⁰ A variant reading occurs with this verse, one that involves a matter of accent. If read as Nestle-Aland and Majority Text have it, Ἰουνιᾶν is a masculine accusative (Junias). But if read as Ἰουνίαν, the form is a feminine accusative (Junia).

¹¹ The BDAG lexicon, for example, has listings for both *Junias* (masc.) and *Junia* (fem.). Under the latter BDAG states: “*Junia*, compatriot or relative of Paul, one who like Paul suffered imprisonment, and distinguished among the apostles. Ancient commentators took Andronicus and Junia as a married couple.”

¹² The perfect participle in Hebrews 2:9 and the aorist indicative of Hebrews 2:7 are forms of the same verb used by the LXX in Psalm 8:5 (6).

¹³ Malachi 2:15: “Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth” (NIV 2011).

¹⁴ Another questionable translation of a marriage passage in the NIV of 2011 is Romans 7:3:

So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

¹⁵ The defense of using gender-inclusive language has been compiled by the “Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) that prepared the NIV”—a defense summarized and cited by Thomas Nass in his “NIV Revision 2011” (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 108:2, pages 141-143), where he writes:

To their credit, the CBT conducted a major study of gender language in English using a 4.4 billion word database called the Collins Bank of English, so that their decisions could be based on actual usage and not on subjective opinions. They discovered, for example, that “the gender-neutral pronoun ‘they’ (‘them’/‘their’) is by far the most common way that English-language speakers and writers today refer back to singular antecedents such as ‘whoever,’ ‘anyone,’ ‘somebody,’ ‘a person,’ ‘no one, and the like.’” In other words, it is now considered normal to say, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24 TNIV). (142)

¹⁶ Interestingly enough, the grammar checker of Microsoft Word suggests changing “themselves” in this passage to “himself or herself.”

Two historical novels about the Saxon emigration to Missouri

Robert J. Koenig: *Except the Corn Die—A Novel of the 1839 Saxon Lutheran Emigration to America*, Saxon Lutheran Heritage, Inc., 1975, 1995, paperback, 474 pages.

Stella Wuerffel: *Two Rivers to Freedom*, Clayton Publishing House, Inc., 1980, hard cover, 382 pages.

The year 2011 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of C. F. W. Walther, generally recognized as the Lutheran leader chiefly responsible under God’s blessing for a resurgence of orthodox confessional Lutheranism in the United States in the 19th century. The Church of the Lutheran Confession recognized God’s gift of Walther in a series of articles printed in the 1965 volume of the *Lutheran Spokesman*. Statements made about Walther at that time included these:

Dr. Walther was an outstanding gift. His name must be mentioned with the men since St. Paul like Augustine, Athanasius, Martin Luther and their like.

Everything you and I have learned to treasure, all that was good in the Synodical Conference—its faithfulness to the Gospel, its emphasis on sound doctrine, its hatred for all error, its determination to establish Christian day schools, its thorough indoctrination of pastors, teachers, members—all this must be credited (humanly speaking) to that one man, Walther.

Walther was a courageous battler for the truth. He was always honest. Though he anxiously yearned to establish one Lutheran church across the land, his awe for God’s Word was so great that compromise was out of the question for him.

He stressed above all objective justification, that God had proclaimed an Easter pardon for every sinner in the world. Therein lay Walther’s greatness, his meaning, his success.

Yes, we have inherited much from Walther and the Missouri Synod. The entire concept of a confessional Lutheran church in a free society, uncompromising loyalty to Christ, an appreciation of the central truth of objective justification, the importance of Christian schools, sound congregational life adapted to a democratic society, excellent organization, and a burning zeal for mission work.

The quotations above appeared in the *Lutheran Spokesman* article, "The Walther Bequest" (W. Schaller, Jr., 8:3, pages 10-12).

In view of Walther's significance it is important that we have an understanding of the Saxon emigration to Missouri in 1839, when Walther, though a pastor, was still a very young man. No doubt, the most detailed account of this emigration is recounted in Walter Forster's book, *Zion on the Mississippi*. Other important facts can be found in Carl Mundinger's book, *Government in the Missouri Synod*.

Recently I had the opportunity to read two historical novels that cover the same historical ground, both of them written by descendants of the original Saxon emigrants. Stella Wuerffel dedicated her book, *Two Rivers to Freedom*, to her maternal Saxon grandparents, the Schurichts and the Tirmensteins, who arrived in St. Louis on February 19, 1839. Robert Koenig, a Lutheran pastor, dedicated his book, *Except the Corn Die*, to his Saxon forefathers who settled in Perry County, Missouri, south of St. Louis along the Mississippi River.

Both of these novels begin the story in Germany at a time when rationalism was taking over churches and schools that once were confessional. A small contingent of young Lutheran pastors, theology students, and their congregations, along with influential lay leaders, began to understand the consequences of this apostasy from the true Christian faith. They were concerned about their children and their grandchildren. Their recognized leader was an older pastor in Dresden, Martin Stephan, who was idolized by the young pastors as one brave leader still teaching and preaching the true, comforting Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Both books refer to Walther in his twenties as a musician, scholar, and a loyal follower of Stephan. Both stories also give more attention to Pastor Heinrich Loeber and his family, relatives, and congregation, many of whom joined the emigration led by Stephan. Already in Germany Stephan had his critics who questioned his extreme statements and his late night-time meetings. But his young followers were so taken with his strong Lutheran teaching that they were not prone to suspect his leadership qualities. He was able to convince them that he and those who followed him were the only Christians truly awakened in Germany and that they must go to America to save their souls.

After extensive preparations were made, five ships sailed from Germany to America, one of which was lost at sea. The emigrants sailed up the Mississippi River from New Orleans to St. Louis and so began their new life in Missouri. But they were virtually unprepared for what they would come to experience. Most of them were not used to the hard work needed to clear forests and build homes. Even though they brought considerable money with them, Stephan managed to spend much of it on foolish things like expensive books and elaborate vestments. On the journey Stephan had persuaded the group to name him their bishop with dictatorial powers over their material goods, as well as being their spiritual head, whom all were bound to obey.

Even if Stephan had been a wise leader, the emigrants would have had difficulty in their new surroundings. But as both stories point out, Stephan became increasingly self-important and demanding. His dream was to establish a colony with himself as head, living in a bishop's palace and having all of his young pastors and their flocks doing his bidding. No doubt, the hardest blow came when several women confessed to Pastor Loeber that they had committed adultery with their spiritual leader, Bishop Stephan. Perhaps the group did not handle this situation very well, but the end result was the deposing of the unrepentant Stephan, whom they sent across the Mississippi to Illinois. There he lived to the end of his life and even served as pastor to a Lutheran congregation that had no connection with the Saxons living in Missouri.

After Stephan's departure the young pastors tried to take his place as leaders of the group, but many of the members began to doubt that these men had proper calls to serve them as their pastors. They had abandoned their congregations in Germany. Perhaps the only right thing to do would be to return there. But this, of course, they could not afford to attempt, for they were now poverty-stricken and even in

danger of starvation and disease.

The majority of the group had followed Stephan to Perry County, south of St. Louis, where they tried to build homes for themselves and to raise crops in hilly and forested country. But a sizable contingent remained in St. Louis, where they could find gainful employment and strive to become more independent. Stella Wuerffel's novel concentrates on the settlers in St. Louis, whereas Pastor Koenig's novel has more to say about the Saxon Lutherans who settled in Perry County.

Both of the stories refer to the efforts of Dr. Carl Eduard Vehse, a well-educated lawyer who sought to bring order to the group after Stephan was no longer in charge. He drew up theses or statements for study that declared on the basis of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions that pastors had no authority to set themselves up as spiritual leaders without a call from their fellow Christians. "Laymen have the right to judge all doctrine and to supervise all the activities of the clergy," he wrote. At first the pastors were not willing to go along with such an apparently radical idea. It was contrary to their experience in Germany, where the state government regulated the affairs of the church.

The group in St. Louis began to function more in line with Vehse's ideas and called Walther's brother Otto to be their pastor. As one of Stephan's most loyal followers he was terribly distressed by the fact that he had been led astray. In a short time Otto Walther passed away, and the congregation called his brother C. F. W. (commonly called Ferdinand) to be their next pastor. At first Walther could not accept this call, since he was too weak physically and spiritually. In fact, he had been almost out of commission for a whole year with sickness and spiritual distress brought on by his confusion concerning God's will in the matter of church and ministry. Must he return to Germany? Was he truly a pastor? At first he too opposed the theses of Vehse. But in his time of recuperation he had opportunity to read Luther's writings on the subject and examine the Scriptures more carefully, and thus he came to the conclusion that Vehse was right in his contention concerning laymen and the pastor's call.

Vehse himself had given up on the group and had returned to Germany, but the turmoil had continued. Before Ferdinand could accept the call to St. Louis, he had to clarify the situation for the Perry County settlers. So he called for a friendly debate with the lawyer, Adolph Marbach, who had been trying to persuade the group that the only proper course for them was to return to Germany. Pastor Koenig concludes the story of his book with the famous Altenburg debate between Ferdinand Walther and Marbach, in which Walther defended eight theses that subsequently became the basis for the Missouri Synod's understanding of church and ministry. In *Zion on the Mississippi* Walter Forster wrote: "If there was any single factor which saved the colonies from complete dissolution and from the corrosive forces of further internal controversy, it was the Altenburg Debate" (p. 525). At this debate C. F. W. Walther showed that he had recovered from his own personal confusion on the matter and emerged as the spiritual leader of the Saxon Lutherans. But it would not be in the hierarchical manner of Martin Stephan. Walther would be a pastor called by a Christian congregation, of whom he became a servant under Christ, the true head of His Church. For more information on this matter and its bearing on the doctrine of church and ministry, one can see *Out of Necessity*, pages 88-106.

Interestingly, both historical novels extol Pastor Loeber's sister, Christel, who cheerfully comforted many of the settlers in their troubles and willingly endangered her own life to take care of the sick and the dying in their midst. She herself died from disease at a young age and was mourned by the entire community.

In order to round out their stories, both novelists invent a few leading characters and introduce certain fictional elements having to do with courtship and marriage. However, both authors did their research well and made every effort to present life as it was at that time. As descendants of the original settlers they had access to letters written by the persons who had experienced these events firsthand. They also heard the recollections of their grandparents, who had heard many true accounts from their ancestors. In his preface Pastor Koenig states: "I do believe that what I have written is above serious challenge in regard to historical accuracy. Many, perhaps most, of the letters I have included in the text are translations of letters actually written by the individuals named as the writers in *Except the Corn Die*" (p. vi). In the foreword to Stella Wuerffel's book Dr. August Suelflow writes: "Because of the many years of research Miss Wuerffel has spent on the period of the 1830's and 40's, she undoubtedly knows the events

described more intimately than any other living person. She knows the people involved and has seen their inner strengths and weaknesses” (p. i).

These two books may be somewhat difficult to obtain today. But if anyone is interested in this period of history and the related background of confessional Lutheranism in America, I certainly recommend making a search for these books and enjoying them both as I did.

- David Lau