

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 53

DECEMBER 2013

NUMBER 4

CONTENTS

Christmas For a Small Crowd.....	David Schaller
A Lenten Series: <i>Repentance Questions Answered</i> How Do I Repent? (Sermon #6)	Frank Gantt
<i>Blest or Blesséd?</i>	John Pfeiffer
Handling Repentance of Public Sin in Our Modern Day	John Hein
Use and Misuse of the Term “In God’s Eyes”	Michael Roehl
Book Review: <i>The Spirit of Pietism</i>	By: Robert J. Koester
(Reviewer: David Lau)	

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Christmas For a Small Crowd

David Schaller

* Preached on December 25, 2013, at Sister Lakes, Michigan, the following Christmas Day sermon has Luke 2:1-20 as its text. Verses quoted below are taken from the *New International Version*.

It happens in a similar way every year. The evening of December 24th arrives with great excitement. Parents help their children find special dresses or outfits. Cards are prepared; presents are wrapped. Everyone gets in the car and goes to church for the special service. Young boys and girls glorify God and praise the birth of Jesus in song and story, and for some of them it is the first time they have ever stood up in front of so many people. And there *are* so many people, aren't there? There always seems to be a good crowd on Christmas Eve. In fact, some years there is hardly a place to sit.

Then comes the next morning. The day of the great festival itself; in fact, the first day of the Christmas season. The altar is draped in white. The Christ candle on the Advent wreath is lit for the first time. The lights are aglow, and perhaps some morning sunshine is reflecting off the snow. But in the church pews?—there are often only a few compared to the night before. And it is that way not just here, but everywhere else I have been, as families tend to hold their Christmas celebrations on the 25th at home.

But even though just a small group of us are gathered here on Christmas Day, we will not let it dampen the excitement or appreciation we have for what God has done—because *Christmas can be for a small crowd too*. In fact, that is how it was on that first Christmas Day.

We are so familiar with the account in Luke 2, in which the angel comes to the shepherds out in the fields near Bethlehem, who are “keeping watch over their flocks by night.” Suddenly the glory of the Lord shines all around, and the angel says: **“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord”** (2:10-11). It is the most amazing news that the earth has ever heard! It is news for “all people”—and yet how many actually heard it that night? It was a relatively small crowd, wasn't it?

In a Christmas sermon Martin Luther has suggested that there were only two shepherds out there in that field. The Bible does not state exactly how many there were, but surely it was fewer than we had in church last night, and most likely even less than are here today. That famous announcement of Jesus' birth was said to *only a few people*.

Then **“a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests’”** (2:13-14). And there too—a *multitude* of angels shouting glory and brightening the sky with the astounding news of the birth of the Son of God, the Savior of the world who had come—yes, so *many* angels, but what a small Christmas crowd there was to hear the amazing news!

Do you think the angel messengers were disappointed? When God the Father sent them to proclaim the birth of the newborn King and they gathered together, filling the sky, a whole company of heavenly beings rejoicing at the salvation that was to appear to mankind—did they look down on that field and think: “What? God sent so many of us for just a few shepherds? Is this really all there is for such a great event? Doesn't this news deserve a bigger audience? Isn't it better than this?” They did not think that way at all. Instead, the heavens rang with a great *Gloria in excelsis Deo*—Glory to God in the highest!

That first Christmas, wherever it was made known that the Son of God had come to earth, there were only a few on hand to celebrate the news. **“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”** And when the shepherds went, that is just what they found. Mary and Joseph huddled around a manger because there was no room in the inn. That was it. That was the whole group: several shepherds and a young couple with their baby.

It was *Christmas for a small crowd*. But notice how that crowd rejoiced to see the day.

Sometimes the number of people at our own Christmas gatherings is less than what we wish it

would be. Perhaps family members, with whom we would love to share the holiday, cannot travel the distance to be with us. Or maybe some of those who used to join us around the Christmas tree are not there anymore, since the Lord has taken them to Himself.

Yet even so, how we still rejoice to see the day of Jesus' birth! This good news is announced, even if it is just two or three gathered together: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”** (Isa. 9:6).

You do not need to be part of a large crowd to enjoy Christmas. Really all it takes is you and one other: the Christ-Child in the manger. This day He comes *to you*.

He comes, as the angel said to Joseph, to save you from your sins—from that fearful burden that would otherwise ruin you. He comes to save you from the many times you have broken God's holy commandments. At those times when you have wept over what you have done and have thought, “How can I make this right with God? Can He ever love me? Can He ever want me?”—then Christ comes and says: It is not you but *I* who will make it right! And He does—by His bitter cross, by taking your burden on Himself, by suffering for it all. This day this Child, the *Savior*, Christ the Lord, comes *to you*.

No, we do not need to be part of a large crowd to appreciate the personal peace of sins forgiven, which Christmas Day truly means for each one of us.

I am pure, in Thee believing, From Thy store Evermore
Righteous robes receiving. In my heart I will enfold Thee,
Treasure rare, Let me there, Loving, ever hold Thee (TLH 77:14).

For the angels, for the shepherds, for Mary and Joseph, this message concerning the Child was the thing that gave them joy. It did not matter to them if there were a hundred or fifty or five to hear it with them. What mattered was that Jesus had come to save them from their sins and in the end to “take them to heaven to live with Him there.”

God the Father could've surely announced at first the birth of Christ to a much larger crowd. On the night that the Savior came, He could have let everyone in Bethlehem know right away, or everyone in Judea, or even everyone in the world. What might it tell us about our God that He put such emphatic effort—an angel chorus in the sky, no less—into making the news known to so few?

It shows us how much He cares about even one or two—about just you or me—that He is not beneath putting forth His best effort, even if you are the only one who will hear. How great is His love in reaching out to the individual!

It shows us that God sent His Son for *all*, that even the smallest towns and the remotest circumstances are not too small or insignificant for Him. Whether it's a handful in Michigan or a few gathered under a tree in eastern Africa, Jesus is born for us and for them.

It shows us that God treats *the message concerning the Child* as the main thing, that the word of Christ can dwell richly among a few just as it can among many.

It also shows us that the message is meant *to be shared*. For even though it was a small crowd on that first Christmas, having so few in number did not hinder in the least God's ability to get the news out far and wide of the Savior's birth.

From just a few shepherds the word went out that the Lord had come. From just a few shepherds who **“spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,”** the message traveled from the manger to the rest of Bethlehem, then out to the hill country, into Judea, and beyond. It was passed on to the evangelist Luke, who gave it permanent record in the Gospel that he wrote. It was learned by Paul and preached by him, the apostle who rejoiced that “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son” (Gal. 4:4 NKJ). In due time the word went out to your grandparents and your parents and others—people whom the Holy Spirit then used to bring it to you.

The angels announced the birth of Jesus to a very small group on Christmas night, but news like that could not be stopped. The saving truth that God and man are *reconciled* is too great not to spread to more, and more, and more.

That first *Christmas for a small crowd* has turned into millions and millions of voices across the

centuries praising God and saying, “Glory in the highest!” Starting with only a handful of humble shepherds, these praises are now heard throughout the world. Starting with the few we have here this morning, who knows how large a crowd will eventually hear the Christmas story?—but it will be many. You tell your children, and they tell theirs, and they tell theirs. And so when we tell just one person, we are telling many more than one. And even where only two or three are gathered together, the word that Jesus has come to save sinners goes out from there—until finally there will be gathered in the heavenly Jerusalem an innumerable company of angels and God’s people singing that *Gloria* once again in the *largest of all Christmas crowds!*

My heart for very joy doth leap,
My lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue
That sweetest ancient cradle-song:

Glory to God in highest heaven,
Who unto us His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth
A glad new year to all the earth.
Amen.

How Do I Repent? Luke 18:10-14 and Acts 26:19-20

Frank Gantt

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

For the past five weeks of the Lenten season we have considered the topic of repentance. Tonight we will conclude our focused review of this very important subject. To do so, we need to answer a final question. So far we have examined what repentance is, who should repent, why should we repent, when should we repent, and where to obtain true repentance. One question we have yet to answer is How? *How do I repent?*

That’s an important question too. When parents tell their children to do a certain task, it is often necessary that they first explain how the task is to be performed. Failure to do so could result in problems, even injury, depending on what the task is. Since repentance is such an important part of the Christian life, it can also lead to spiritual injury if we don’t understand how to repent, as we learn from our first text this evening, what Christ said in Luke 18:10-14:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (ESV)

This account is often referred to as the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The title seems adequate enough, and the story told is certainly a parable, as the context of verse 9 makes clear: *“He also spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt”* (ESV). As such it doesn’t matter whether Jesus related an actual occurrence or simply used the hypocrisy of the Pharisees as a model for the story told. His point, His lesson remains our main concern, which offers a contrast between going about repentance in a wrong way and obtaining repentance in the proper and beneficial way. In a sense we could think of this parable as a much needed tutorial on the how-to of Christian repentance.

But before teaching us how to repent, Jesus teaches how not to repent. This first lesson is to be found in the attitude of the Pharisee. In order to understand it, we must recall again what repentance is and why it is so necessary. Repentance, remember, comprises only two things: sorrow for sin and faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Well, as we can readily see, there isn't the least bit of sorrow in the so-called prayer of the Pharisee. In fact, he seems quite pleased with himself. He boasts of his accomplishments. He compares himself with others and likes what *he* sees in *himself*.

And maybe as far as outward appearances were concerned, he was better than the tax collector. So what? Repentance does not begin with a subjective standard that is measured against what other people are like. Repentance begins with the high and holy standard of God's Law, which includes as a very key ingredient that we be holy just as God Himself is holy. Part of true repentance, then, is comparing yourself to the proper standard. Think of it like the tasting of an apple. Who cares if a certain kind of apple tastes better than a chunk of bark. What a person wants to know is whether it tastes like an apple should taste—sweet, mildly tart, crisp. So also, repentance begins with the only standard to which we are held accountable and that standard is God's holiness.

Since there was no sorrow for sin expressed by the Pharisee, his prayer naturally expressed no faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. No one goes to a doctor unless he thinks he is sick or injured. So also, this Pharisee did not approach God in prayer for what God could provide him, but rather for what he thought he could provide God, which in his own estimation was far more than the no-good tax collector standing in the back of the temple court.

Now to demonstrate the great injury that comes from a wrong approach to repentance, we skip ahead to what Jesus concludes about the Pharisee and his approach in the temple. Jesus tells us that he was not the one who went home justified, or forgiven of his sins. Of course, it's not that forgiveness wasn't available to the man. Rather, it's that he spurned it; he cast it away in favor of something more appetizing to his spiritual palate, namely, his own righteousness. Without that forgiveness of sins and without proper repentance to take hold of it, this Pharisee was going to perish in hell. That, let's realize, is truly what's at stake: not a person's standing in the eyes of others, but a person's eternal destination.

Now we consider the right way to repent. It is demonstrated in the attitude and prayer of the tax collector who said, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*" We hear a deep sorrow in his prayer. There's no "I've done this and that good deed." There's not even a claim of "I promise to do better in the future." The only comparison he could make between himself and the Pharisee would be an admission that he's the greater sinner, because the sins he knows he has committed are far worse and far more than the sins he knows the Pharisee has committed. That's why in the Greek he doesn't call himself "a sinner," but "*the sinner.*" He had only himself in view, with no excuses to offer, no comparisons to make—only the realization of guilt and condemnation deserved for all the sins he had committed against the holy God.

So what hope did that awareness of his sin and the sorrow for his sin leave him? It left only one hope—that God would atone for the man's sins based on His mercy and His plan of redemption. In that same temple where he had confessed his sin, he had the visual reminder of what God would do with those sins. It was there in the animal sacrifices that he could see God's intent to lay the blame and punishment of his sins to the account of a substitute who, as the prophecies of Christ surely foretold, would make the atoning payment necessary to secure the sure mercy of God's forgiveness. Surely the tax collector also had the Gospel in mind when he prayed, "*God, be merciful to me (lit. propitiated to me), the sinner.*"

On what basis, then, could such a scoundrel appeal to the mercy of the holy God? What gave this sinful tax collector boldness in seeking such mercy when at the same time he admits his own unworthiness? Only one thing would provide such boldness; it is found in the words and promises of God. This leads us to consider our second text in [Acts 26:19-20](#). These words were spoken by the apostle Paul as he stood on trial before King Agrippa, a trial that happened after the Jews had accused him of committing crimes against the Jewish nation and also against the Roman Empire. Having this opportunity before him, Paul gave a brief yet clear and solid defense of the Gospel. In his words to King Agrippa we hear how he had become both a believer in Christ and a missionary for Christ:

“Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.” (ESV)

Many hear these words and, like the Pharisee in our first text, take from them a wrong approach to repentance. Repentance, they believe, is doing good deeds. But that is not what Paul says. He equates repentance as a turning to God; and as we heard in our first reading, the only turning to God that leads to justification is that of having sorrow for sin and trust in God’s mercy that comes through Jesus Christ. That’s not to say that good deeds have no place, but their place always comes *after* repentance, as the demonstration of the sincerity of it—never before it as the cause of God’s justification.

In this regard we consider two of the Lord’s disciples as pointed examples. First there was Judas. Judas was at least sorry for his sin, which is more than one can say for the Pharisee. But in the end his faulty version of repentance caused him to reject God’s mercy and forgiveness too. He, like the Pharisee, decided his fate would better be left in his own hands. So he went out, returned the betrayal money to the religious leaders, and then killed himself. From the works-centered perspective of his unbelief, it was what he could do—the only thing he could do. For as long as one is hell-bent on doing something to atone for his sins, that’s about as good as anything that the Pharisee had to offer, because nothing we do or give up or sacrifice, including ourselves, can make up for our sins.

By a miracle of God’s grace Peter’s course would be different. He took the path of the tax collector. Oh, we suspect that he was just as sorry as Judas for his pitiful performance in the courtyard of the high priest. Those bitter tears he shed were undoubtedly real and honest. No one in that courtyard could possibly have been so wicked as he. In the mirror of God’s Law Peter knew himself to be a scoundrel. He heard the accusations of his own conscience, in right agreement with God’s holy Law, and all he could muster was a bitter, tearful Amen.

The miracle in Peter’s case, however, wasn’t the sorrow over his sin, but especially the faith, though weak it might have been, to trust that Jesus would still receive him. Peter had heard Him forgive so many others for the past three years, and now the only hope he had was to rely on this same merciful Lord forgiving him too. Ultimately Peter’s faith in Jesus proved valid, for Jesus Himself was the Substitute God sent to atone for his sins and the sins of all people. This He did hours later on the altar of the cross, offering His holy blood as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Just like Peter and Paul and the penitent tax collector, that is how we repent. With contrite hearts we confess our sins and say Amen to the indictment of God’s Law that condemns us. And in faith we listen to the Gospel that declares all our sins to be forgiven for Jesus’ sake. By God’s grace we say Amen once more and go home justified, declared righteous by the Judge who accepts the sacrifice of Christ as the full payment of our debt. Then with the peace of God’s forgiveness as our own, we live our lives so as to bring forth the fruits of that repentance, as we turn from our former sins, strive to glorify God in all that we think, say, and do, and even forgive as we have been forgiven. It will be the grace of our merciful God that makes it so. Amen!

Blest or Blesséd?
A Study of the Use of יָשַׁר and μακάριος
John Pfeiffer

* The following is the conclusion to the essay that appeared in the previous issue (*Journal* 53:3, pages 37-47). Part I has focused on the study of the pertinent Hebrew terms. Part II below will resume with the study of the main Greek term μακάριος. For the sake of retaining some continuity, two sections from Part I are repeated below. Material quoted from sources is cited per MLA guidelines. See Works Cited on page 24.

In the Greek New Testament the words μακάριος and εὐλογητός are commonly translated with the letters *b-l-e-s-s-e-d*. Nevertheless, these terms are not synonyms. The concepts expressed by each are distinct from one another. Likewise, the Hebrew terms בָּרֵךְ and אֲשֶׁר have different concepts. When no distinction is made in translating or enunciating these terms, the English reader is deprived of a portion of divine revelation. How, then, can we help our hearers note the distinction and gain the full flavor of words that the Spirit uses? What are the distinctions?

* Does אֲשֶׁר mean the same thing as בָּרֵךְ?

* Does μακάριος mean the same thing as εὐλογητός?

* Does “bless-éd” mean the same thing as “blessed” (*blest*)?

Μακάριος

Since μακάριος is the usual Septuagint (LXX) translation for אֲשֶׁר, it is fitting that we consider this term also. In his “Exegetical Notes” available online Brian Stoffregen states the following about the non-biblical usage of the word, which by his own admission was “mostly taken from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*”:

In ancient Greek times, *makarios* referred to the gods. The blessed ones were the gods. They had achieved a state of happiness and contentment in life that was beyond all cares, labors, and even death. The blessed ones were beings who lived in some other world away from the cares and problems and worries of ordinary people. To be blessed, you had to be a god.

Makarios took on a second meaning. It referred to the “dead.” The blessed ones were humans, who, through death, had reached the other world of the gods. . . .

Finally, in Greek usage, *makarios* came to refer to the elite, the upper crust of society, the wealthy people. It referred to people whose riches and power put them above the normal cares and problems and worries of the lesser folk—the peons, who constantly struggle and worry and labor in life. To be blessed, you had to be very rich and powerful. (Stoffregen)

Thus μακάριος conceptualizes a status or set of circumstances most to be desired. The “gods” and also the wealthy are considered by the ancients as being in this most desired state. Of course, the world-view at work here believes that the desired state is that in which one has no lack of wealth or power. However, when the Spirit took hold of this word, He transformed it from the concerns of the physical and material world to those of the spiritual world. The desired set of circumstances appears to be the opposite of that desired by the world, as one can see particularly in the Beatitudes: *poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the persecuted*, etc.

How well do the New Testament lexicons bear this out in their listing of definitions and glosses (in italics) for μακάριος? Compare what is offered below from Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich (BDAG), Louw-Nida (L-N), Moulton-Milligan (M-M), Friberg (Fri.), and Thayer (Th.).

BDAG: 1. pertaining to being fortunate or happy because of circumstances, *fortunate, happy, privileged, blessed*; 2. pertaining to being esp. favored, *blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged*, from a transcendent perspective, the more usual sense (the general Gr.-Rom. perspective: one on whom fortune smiles) a. of humans *privileged recipients of divine favor*.

L-N: pertaining to being happy, with the implication of enjoying favorable circumstances, “happy.”

M-M: is used in the LXX for אֲשֶׁר (Ps. 1:1, al.), “Oh, the happiness of . . .!”, and in Hebrew thought denotes a state of true well-being.

Fri.: of persons characterized by transcendent happiness or religious joy *blessed, happy*.

Th.: *blessed, happy* . . . the reason why one is to be pronounced blessed is expressed by a noun or by a participle taking the place of the subject.

We can add to the above a few pointed observations from Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* which are found under the heading “The Word Group in the New Testament”:

The special feature of the group μακάριος, μακαρίζειν, μακαρισμός in the NT is that it refers overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God. . . . The noun μακαρισμός is found . . . at [Galatians] 4:15 for the

blessedness of receiving the message of salvation, and at [Romans] 4:6, 9 with reference to the remission of sins. (Hauck 367)

As in Gk. macarisms, there is often contrast with a false estimation as to who is truly blessed. . . . A clear difference from the Gk. beatitudes is that all secular goods and values are now completely subsidiary to the one supreme good, the kingdom of God, whether it be that the righteous man may hope for this, is certain of it, has a title to it, or already has a part in it. The predominating estimation of the kingdom of God carries with it a reversal of all customary evaluations. Thus the NT beatitudes often contain sacred paradoxes. (Hauck 368)

In all these verses [Matt. 16:17, John 20:29, Luke 11:28, et al] the light of future glory shines over the sorry present position of the righteous. Thus the NT beatitudes are not just intimations of the future or consolations in relation to it. They see the present in the light of the future. (Hauck 369)

Μακάριος vs. Εὐλογητός

Εὐλογητός refers to “good speech,” that is, good words spoken about someone (*praise*). When coming from the mouth of God, the words are effective, with actual power effecting or granting the very matters that they express. When in the mouth of man, the words express his thoughts, but have no innate power. At best such words can only acknowledge what is already understood to be true.

The English verb “to bless” is an acceptable translation for εὐλογέω. Whereas “*b-l-e-s-s-e-d*” is the usual translation for εὐλογητός, it would seem that “*praised*” or “*praiseworthy*” would express the Greek concept in a better way. If the word “*eulogize*” was not used primarily in the setting of funerals, this would be an excellent translation for εὐλογητός.

As for the word “*blesséd*” as an adjective, this should be distinguished from the past tense of the verb “to bless,” i.e., “*bléssed*” (*blest*). The latter refers to the fact that a blessing has been extended in the past. The former refers to that status in which a person finds himself in the present. Expressing the distinction is the main issue in determining the best way to translate the pertinent word. Thus we should ask: Does the word “*bléssed*” (*blest*) as a translation for μακάριος relay the correct concept to the English-speaking reader? Does this word express what God is saying?

Μακάριος in usage

In Luke 6 we hear Christ contrast μακάριος with οὐαί (Louw-Nida: “a state of intense hardship or distress – ‘disaster, horror’”):

Verse 20: *Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: “Blessed (μακάριοι) are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”*

Verse 24: *“But woe (οὐαί) to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”*

Both of these words are pronouncements by which Christ declares the state of the persons described. The latter are in a state of woe; the former are in a state of blessedness. Both are in that state right now. Of course, these states do have an effect on their future, eternal destinies, but the blessedness and the woe are present realities nevertheless.

How should one translate μακάριος in the following passage? In Luke 1:42 and 1:45 it is Elizabeth speaking:

Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed (εὐλογημένη) are you among women, and blessed (εὐλογημένος) is the fruit of your womb! . . . Blessed (μακαρία) is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

On the one hand, Mary is worthy of a eulogy (εὐλογημένη *well-spoken-of; praised*), because the Lord had chosen her for this highest of honors (cf. her Magnificat). On the other hand, she is declared *blesséd*(μακαρία) because of her status as the mother of the promised Messiah.

Modern translators seem to prefer the word “happy” as a translation for μακάριος. There are problems connected with this term, however. As used in America especially, this word can be shallow. It

is often equated with an emotional feeling of glee. Although it may produce feelings, the state of μακάριος in itself is not a feeling. In fact, one who is in a state of μακάριος may not be feeling happy at all.

The word “happy” would not fit the use of μακάριος in certain passages. Consider the following, in which the underlined Greek term is rendered with “happy”:

Matt. 5:4: Μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες· ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται (*“Blesséd are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”*)

— *“Happy are those who are sad. . . .”*

Luke 11:27: Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ λέγειν αὐτὸν ταῦτα ἐπάρασά τις φωνὴν γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Μακαρία ἡ κοιλία ἡ βαστάσασά σε καὶ μαστοὶ οὐκ ἐθήλασας.

— *“Happy is the womb. . . .”*

Luke 23:29: ὅτι ἰδοὺ ἔρχονται ἡμέραι ἐν αἷς ἐροῦσιν, Μακάριαι αἱ στῆραι καὶ αἱ κοιλιαὶ αἱ οὐκ ἐγέννησαν καὶ μαστοὶ οὐκ ἔθρεψαν. — *“Happy are the barren and the wombs which never bore and the breasts which never nursed.”*

Acts 20:35: . . . μνημονεύειν τε τῶν λόγων τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ὅτι αὐτὸς εἶπεν, Μακάριόν ἐστιν μᾶλλον διδόναι ἢ λαμβάνειν. — *“And to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more happy to give than to receive.’”*

I Timothy 1:11: κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς δόξης τοῦ μακαρίου θεοῦ ὃ ἐπιστεύθη ἐγώ. — *“according to the Gospel of the glory of the happy God, with which I was entrusted.”*

I Timothy 6:15: ἦν καιροῖς ἰδίους δείξει ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων — *“. . . the happy and only Ruler”*

For translators the preferred way seems to be the use of one English word in one context and a different English word in another, but is that the right thing to do? The Spirit has inspired the writers to use the same word in each instance. Μακάριος conveys a single concept. So the question for us comes back to this: Is there an effective English word to convey that single concept?

We might consider the adjective “blesséd” or the noun “blessedness.” However, since the word “bless-éd” is not a common part of American vocabulary, is there another expression that may be used more effectively? We think of biblical terms that cannot be understood properly without the biblical background connected to them (e. g., “grace”). The same holds true for the word “bless-éd”; pastors need to instruct the people as to its meaning in the Bible. This is true even if one translates μακάριος with “happy.” The commonly accepted understanding of “happy” does not properly convey the significance of μακάριος as it is used in Scripture.

What are the possible translations? We consider Matthew 5:3:

Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

“Blesséd are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Since the common translations for μακάριος are “blesséd” and “happy,” we could consider synonyms for these words, mentally inserting them into the passage to determine their suitability.

Synonyms for *happy*: cheerful, entertained, carefree, pleased, felicitous, better off, gladdened, triumphant, well-chosen.

Synonyms for *blesséd*: favored, fortunate, highly favored, favored with blessings, hallowed, consecrated, beatified, saved, endued with, worthy of worship, blissful.

Commentators on μακάριος (Matthew 5:3)

Barnes: *“Blesséd are the poor in spirit. The word blessed means happy, referring to that which produces felicity, from whatever quarter it may come”* (43).

Clarke: *“Blesséd are the poor in spirit, etc. - Or, happy, μακαριοι from μα or μη, not, and κηρ, fate, or death: intimating, that such persons were endued with immortality, and consequently were not liable to the caprices of fate. Homer, Iliad i, 330, calls the supreme gods, Θεων μακαρων, the ever happy and Immortal gods, and opposes them to θνητων ανθρωπων, mortal men. . . .”*

“From this definition we may learn, that the person whom Christ terms happy is one who is not under the influence of fate or chance, but is governed by an all-wise providence, having every step directed to the attainment of immortal glory, being transformed by the power into the likeness of the ever-blessed God. Though some of the persons, whose states are mentioned in these verses, cannot be said to be as yet blessed or happy, in being made partakers of the Divine nature; yet they are termed happy by our Lord, because they are on the straight way to this blessedness” (Clarke).

deSilva: “The literary form known as the beatitude, or ‘makarism,’ also relates directly to the delineation of who is honorable and what qualities or behaviors are honorable. K. C. Hanson has helpfully defined the makarism as ‘the public validation of an individual’s or group’s experience, behavior, or attitude as honorable.’ He proposes that the opening of a beatitude should be translated not ‘blessed’ or ‘happy’ or ‘enviable’ but ‘how honorable.’ We should extend that translation to include ‘how honored’ or even ‘how favored’ since makarisms usually also express the concept of having been specially endowed by God with some gift that bestows honor” (287).

Thomas: “The title ‘Beatitudes’ is derived from the Latin word beatus. This adjective is the equivalent of the Hebrew asherey. It describes a state of happy and successful prosperity. It is not so much a state of inner feeling on the part of those to whom applied, but rather of blessedness from an ideal point of view in the judgment of others. It should be distinguished from eulogetos and its cognates which always render baruk in the O. T. (Allen, p. 39; M’Neile, p. 50; Broadus, pp. 87-88). This latter word looks more at what is bestowed or attributed from an external source while makarios appeals to the absolute state (*‘Preliminary Exegetical Digest of Matthew 5-7,13,24,’* pg. 14)” (qtd. in Heck).

Heck: [quoting Carson] “Attempts to make makarios mean “happy” and eulogetos “blessed” (Broadus) are therefore futile; though both appear many times, both can apply to either God or man. It is difficult not to conclude that their common factor is approval; man “blesses” God, approving and praising him; God “blesses” man, approving him in gracious condescension” [D. A. Carson, *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Matthew*; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978, p. 131]. In an endnote Heck goes on to state: “If Carson is correct, then makarios does not refer to simple ‘happiness.’ Zodiates would agree: ‘This book will point up the basic difference between the two words “blessed” (makarioi in Greek) and “happy.” To put it briefly here, “blessed” refers to the one whose sufficiency is within him, while “happy” refers to the one whose sufficiency comes from outside sources. . . . ‘Happy comes from the word “hap,” meaning “chance.” It is therefore incorrect to translate the word makarioi (which we find repeatedly in the Beatitudes) as “happy.” It means something far different, in its real sense; it means “blessed.”’ (“The Pursuit of Happiness,” Chattanooga: AMG Press, 1966, preface) John MacArthur, Jr., however, suggests that makarios does mean ‘happy,’ stating: ‘Makarios means happy, fortunate, blissful. Horner [sic] used the word to describe a wealthy man, and Plato used it of one who is successful in business. Both Homer and Hesiod spoke of the Greek gods as being happy (makarios) within themselves, because they were unaffected by the world of men—who were subject to poverty, disease, weakness, misfortune and death . . . an inward contentedness that is not affected by circumstances.’ (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1985, pg. 142)” (Heck).

France: “‘Macarisms’ are essentially commendations, congratulations, statements to the effect that a person is in a good situation, sometimes even expressions of envy. The Hebrew equivalent of *makarios* is *ašrê* rather than the more theologically loaded *bārûk*, ‘blessed (by God).’ The traditional English rendering ‘blessed’ thus also has too theological a connotation in modern usage; the Greek term for ‘blessed (by God)’ is *eulogētos*, not *makarios*. The sense of congratulation and commendation is perhaps better conveyed by ‘happy,’ but this term generally has too psychological a connotation: *makarios* does not state that a person *feels* happy (‘Happy are those who mourn’ is a particularly inappropriate translation if the word is understood in that way), but that they are in a ‘happy’ situation, one which other people ought also to wish to share. ‘Fortunate’ gets closer to the sense, but has inappropriate connotations of luck. ‘Congratulations to. . .’ would convey much of the impact of a ‘macarism,’ but perhaps sounds too colloquial. The Australian idiom ‘Good on yer’ is perhaps as close as any to the sense, but would not communicate in the rest of the English-speaking world! My favorite translation of *makarios* is the traditional Welsh rendering of the Beatitudes, *Gwyn eu byd*, literally ‘White is their world,’ an evocative

idiom for those for whom everything is good. Beatitudes are descriptions, and commendations, of the good life” (160-61).

Lenski (on Matt. 5:3): “The Beatitudes read like a Psalm; μακάριοι at once recalls the *’ashre* of Ps. 1:1. ‘Blessed!’ intoned again and again, sounds like bells of heaven, ringing down into this unblessed world from the cathedral spires of the kingdom inviting all men to enter. The word, like its opposite οὐαί, ‘woe,’ is neither a wish regarding a coming condition, nor a description of a present condition, but a judgment pronounced upon the persons indicated, stating that they must be considered fortunate. The form is almost exclamatory: ‘O the blessedness of those who,’ etc.! And it is Jesus who renders this judgment, which is, therefore, absolutely true although all the world may disagree” (183; emph. JP).

Peoples New Testament (Matt. 5:3): “*Blessed*. There follow nine beatitudes, each of which pronounces a blessing upon those who have certain characteristics. The word ‘blessed’ is first applied to God, and means more than ‘happy,’ as it has sometimes been translated. Happiness comes from earthly things; blessedness comes from God. It is not bestowed arbitrarily; a reason follows each beatitude.”

Williams: “Blessed (μακάριοι); Vulgate, *beati*; hence ‘Beatitudes.’ The word describes ‘the poor in spirit,’ etc., not as recipients of blessing (εὐλογημένοι) from God, or even from men, but as possessors of ‘happiness’ (cf. the Authorized Version of John xiii. 17, and frequently). It describes them in reference to their inherent state, not to the gifts or the rewards that they receive. It thus answers in thought to the common יְשָׁרִים of the Old Testament; e.g. 1 Kings x. 8; Psa. i. 1; xxxii. 1; lxxxiv. 5” (146-7).

Choosing a Translation

Although the etymology of μακάριος is not the same as that of יְשָׁרִים, since μακάριος is consistently the Septuagint translation for יְשָׁרִים and since the New Testament writers seem to acknowledge this translation as appropriate, we can treat the two words as synonymous.

For the moment let us forget about the English terms *blesséd* and *blest* and *happy*. We will set aside both the words and the concepts that accompany these words. Having removed them from our minds, we assemble the English letters *a-s-h-r-e-y* as a transliteration of the Hebrew word יְשָׁרִים. And the same can be done for μακάριος: *makarios*.

Next we shall attempt to formulate a concept for this new word. Beginning with the basic concept for the verb יָשַׁר (to *be* or *go straight*) and formulating it into a noun, we come up with the noun “straightness.” With this sense in mind, we conceptualize our new word as expressing some thing or some state of being that is straight or in right alignment with . . . with what? Let us state: In right line with what it is meant to be. The context would determine what that is. If God is the one making the declaration, then it is in perfect line with what God meant it to be.

One thing that we have not accounted for is the fact that יְשָׁרִים is plural in form. For this reason some have quite literally translated: “O the blessednesses of the man. . . .” Using the concept of “straightness,” we find it difficult to convey a plural—“straightnesses”? Perhaps it is sufficient for the present simply to think in terms of straightness as being something that runs from point A to point B and covers much territory in so doing. Thus “straightness” could conform in sense to a plural. It is not straightness at only one point, but could include multiple points along the way.

Note: The Greek term μακάριος appears to be derived from the root μακ-, supposedly meaning “become long or large,” although this is hard to verify. It is not my intent to trace the development of this term and thereby to attempt to resolve an English translation. I believe the biblical concept found in יְשָׁרִים has a bearing on the Spirit’s choice of μακάριος as the parallel Greek term. Therefore the meaning of the Old Testament word should affect our understanding of the New Testament term, while at the same time not forcing an artificial etymological foundation for μακάριος. The older (Hebrew) term provides a concept, which is expressed by the more recent (Greek) term, as well as the modern (English) term. The newer terms should bow to the concept of the older term.

So we now have a new English word (*ashrey*) with an accompanying concept. When we use the word, our minds can form a picture of some *thing* or some *state* extending straight and true, in perfect alignment with the way it is meant to be.

Now how would this concept be applied to the individual texts that contain the Hebrew word אֲשֶׁרִי? We consider again Psalm 1:1:

אֲשֶׁרִי אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר
לֹא הִלְךָ בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים
וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד
וּבִמְוֹשֵׁב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב

ashrey-the-man who
not walks in the counsel of wicked ones
and in the pathway of sinners not stands
and in the seat to (of) mocking ones not sits.

With the new English word *ashrey* we envision a man who is *in a state of being straight and true to the way God meant him to be*.

However, we are still left with a difficulty. Since it defies imagination to find a way to implant a new word in the minds of all English-speaking people, how are we going to translate the word? We are left with the difficulty of choosing an existing English word, but which one?

Happy?

The use of אֲשֶׁרִי in the Old Testament indicates a condition or state of being. Most of the time it appears to be a spiritual condition. Some translations use the word “happy.” In the modern American mind, however, “happy” expresses an emotional sense of pleasure, delight, even euphoria; in other words, a feeling.

An online source provides the following definitions for “happy” with examples of usage:

1. delighted, pleased, or glad, as over a particular thing: to be *happy* to see a person.
2. characterized by or indicative of pleasure, contentment, or joy: a *happy* mood; a *happy* frame of mind.
3. favored by fortune; fortunate or lucky: a *happy*, fruitful land.
4. apt or felicitous, as actions, utterances, or ideas.
5. obsessed by or quick to use the item indicated (usually used in combination): a trigger-*happy* gangster. Everybody is gadget- *happy* these days.

Thus happiness, as it is understood today, is very subjective. Moreover, imbedded in the word itself is the concept of good luck, since the word “happiness” is derived from the Old Norse “happ” (cf. Middle English “hap”), which means *chance* or *good luck*.

When God says that a man is *ashrey*, it is clear that this is objective—an objective state of being. Although the particular state or condition of *ashrey* may produce feelings of happiness, that state or condition is not in and of itself a feeling. *Ashrey* is not a state of mind, but a state of being.

When a person wonders if his situation in life can be characterized by *ashrey*, he should not examine his inner emotions, but his outward and inward circumstances. Psalm 1 describes a godly person’s circumstances. He refrains from walking in the counsel of the wicked, from standing in the pathway of sinners, from sitting in the seat of those who mock God’s truth. Rather, he delights in the instruction of Jehovah. He meditates on God’s Word day and night. This is describing internal and external circumstances. This person is in the state of *ashrey*.

If for lack of a better word the translator chooses “happy,” it should be understood that this is not a feeling of happiness, but rather that the word “happy” describes the circumstances—the spiritual surroundings that affect one’s life, faith, and behavior—in which a person finds himself. Regardless of how the person feels at the moment, his situation is a happy one because of a reason that the Scripture clearly states. It is not a state of mind, but a state of being.

It should be noted that several commentators who use the word “happy” make the point that this happiness is something to be gained in the future, even the distant future of heavenly glory. However, *ashrey* applies to the person at the moment of God’s declaration. This one has become *ashrey* by virtue of the characteristics or benefits indicated in the context.

Consider the input of one Jim Forrest in a December 2004 article posted online:

“‘Happy’ isn’t good enough,” Rabbi Steven Schwarzschild once told me. “The biblical translator who uses such a word should change jobs, maybe write TV comedies with nice happy endings. The problem is that, if you decide you don’t like ‘blessed,’ there isn’t a single English word that can take its place. You might use a phrase like ‘on the right track’ or ‘going in the right direction.’ Sin, by the way, means being off the track, missing the target. Being ‘blessed’ means you aren’t lost—you’re on the path the Creator intends you to be on. But what you recognize as a blessing may look like an affliction to an outsider. Exchanging ‘blessed’ for ‘happy’ trivializes the biblical word. You might as well sum up the Bible with a slogan like, ‘Have a nice day’” (Forrest).

Blesséd?

Blesséd is a word that is potentially open to re-conceptualizing. Most people do not have a clear idea of what the word means. Therefore we can help them to understand the Spirit’s use of this word, even as we do with other biblical words like “grace” or “justify.” The word “blesséd” describes the divine declaration of the desirable status of the person whose life is in perfect line with what God has meant it to be. The context will provide that aspect of life or state that is being so described. Such appears to be the case in the examples below.

Psalm 1:1-2 *Blesséd is the man who does not walk in the counsel of wicked ones and in the pathway of sinners does not stand and in the seat of mocking ones does not sit. But rather in the instruction of the LORD is his desire, and in His instruction he repeatedly meditates day and night* (trans. JP).

* The man who is so characterized (v. 1) and who conducts his daily life in this manner (v. 2) is declared by God as having the status that is in perfect line with what God means it to be. He avoids that which is contrary to the will of God, but embraces that which proclaims the will of God.

Matthew 5:3 *Blesséd are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

* Those who are poor in spirit are declared by Jesus to have a desirable status, one that is in perfect line with what God means it to be. Their status is one of being spiritually poverty-stricken. Such persons recognize that they have nothing of value in the sight of God. God means for all of us to have such a status, to know it, and to receive from Him what is needed for entrance into and citizenship in His heavenly kingdom.

Acts 20:35 *“It is more blesséd to give than to receive.”*

* The status of giving is such that it is in perfect line with what God wants.

1 Kings 10:8 *“Blesséd are your men and blessed are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom!”*

* This is a human evaluation. The queen of Sheba believes that the men and servants of Solomon hold a blessed status, one in which they are privy to Solomon’s wisdom. According to the queen of Sheba, this is a desirable status, one in perfect line with her estimation of what it ought to be.

1 Timothy 1:11 *“According to the Gospel of the glory of the blesséd God, with which I was entrusted.”*

* The status of God is in perfect line with what it is meant to be.

Summary

Μακάριος and בְּרָכָה are terms that describe the status or standing of a person, a thing, or an activity. The character of this status is announce, even determined to be so by the one who declares the blessedness. Likewise, the desirability of the status is dependent on the opinion and authority of the declarer. If the declarer is human, the character of the status is as good or bad as his own knowledge and opinion. If the declarer is God, then the status is determined by the objectivity of faultless, divine knowledge and wisdom and the authority of all that He decrees to be so.

As for the words “blessed” (*blest*) and “happy,” these convey certain concepts already embedded in the minds of people. Such concepts from an English point of view do not necessarily convey the concepts expressed in μακάριος and בְּרָכָה. Therefore we should avoid the use of these as translations or enunciations.

The preferred translation (and pronunciation) is “blesséd.” Since few people have an embedded definition for this term, it will have to be defined for God’s people, just like a number of other Bible terms. The preferred definition for “blesséd” should be something like this:

The pronouncement of a favorable status; a declaration that the object is in a condition that receives the approval of the speaker.

Now when God is the speaker, then the approval is most desirable. Moreover, when God makes the declaration, we may also be sure that God is the one who has granted and certified this status to be so to the blessed ones.

According to the book of Psalms a person has a favorable status in God’s sight when that person is one. . .

- Who avoids wickedness and meditates on God’s Word (Ps. 1:1-2).
- Who puts his trust in God (Ps. 2:12).
- Whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered (Ps. 32:1).
- Who considers the poor (Ps. 41:1).
- Whom the Lord chooses (Ps. 65:4).
- Who dwells in the Lord’s house (Ps. 84:4).
- Whose strength is in the Lord (Ps. 84:5).
- Whom the Lord instructs and teaches (Ps. 94:12).
- Who keeps justice and does righteousness at all times (Ps. 106:3).
- Who fears the Lord and delights greatly in His commandments (Ps. 112:1).
- Who keeps the Lord’s testimonies and seeks Him with the whole heart (Ps. 119:2).
- Who has God for his help and whose hope is in the Lord (Ps. 146:5).

And these describe all believers in Jesus Christ.

According to the Gospel recorded by Matthew, they (we) are in a favorable standing before God .

..

- Who are poor in spirit.
- Who mourn.
- Who are meek.
- Who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- Who are merciful.
- Who are pure in heart.
- Who are peacemakers.
- Who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.
- Who are reviled and persecuted and blasphemed on account of Jesus.

And these characteristics likewise refer to all believers in Jesus Christ.

BLESSÉD IS HE WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD.

Works Cited

Barnes, Albert. *Notes on the New Testament: Matthew and Mark*. Ed. Robert Frew. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.

Clarke, Adam. *Commentary on the Bible: Matthew*. 1831. Available online. Accessed at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/clarke/mat005.htm>.

- deSilva, David A. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Forrest, Jim. "Blessed" (an essay posted on the Orthodox Peace Fellowship website called "In Communion"). Accessed at:
<http://www.incommunion.org/2004/12/27/blessed.htm>.
- France, Richard T. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007.
- Hauck, F. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 4. Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley. Ed. Gerhard Kittel. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1967.
- Heck, Doug V. *The Beatitudes: Character and Conduct of Kingdom Citizens*. "Chapter Two: The Beatitudes" (Matthew 5:1-2). Online access including two endnotes at:
<http://www.grace4u.org/Topical/Beatitudes#FTNT8.htm>.
<http://www.grace4u.org/Topical/Beatitudes#FTNT7.htm>.
- Lenski, Richard C. H. *Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1964.
- Peoples New Testament*. 1891. Available online. Accessed at:
<http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/peoples-new-testament/matthew/5.htm>.
- Stoffregen, Brian P. "Exegetical Notes at CrossMarks: The History of the Word 'MAKARIOS' ('BLESSED')." Accessed at:
<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/allsaintb.htm>.
- Williams, A. Lukyn. *The Pulpit Commentary: St. Matthew* (Vol. 33). Ed. H. D. M. Spence and J. S. Exell. New York: Funk & Wagnalls. No date.

Handling Repentance of Public Sin in Our Modern Day

John Hein

Introduction

My wife and I recently obtained new cell phones. To protect our investment, we purchased Otter Box cell phone cases over the Internet. She chose a gray case; I decided on yellow. Our purchases, however, were coming from two different sources at two different prices. She received hers in a few days and it functioned as it should. Mine was a few dollars cheaper, arrived a few days later, and did not have the proper fit with the phone. While I had ordered mine from a business in Florida, I later discovered it was shipped from China. My guess is that it may have been an imitation.

There's a reason why we like things to be genuine. An imitation doesn't measure up to the quality of the real thing. It potentially has defects, doesn't function as it should, doesn't last as long, and so forth. An imitation can easily let us down.

From Scripture we know that Christian love is to permeate congregational life. Jesus told His disciples on the night before He died: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another*" (John 13:34).¹ This Christian love is expected to be genuine, based upon the love Christ has shown to us through His atoning death on the cross.

One would expect love within a Christian congregation to be real. Even the world perceives that this should be the case. I think back to a childhood experience attending a heterodox church. During the service the pastor suddenly announced that it was time to express Christian love. The person next to me, whom I didn't know, had a fake smile on his face as he grabbed my hand to shake it. Caught off-guard, I later stared at him and noticed that he had returned to being somber. It seemed to me even as a young boy that this practice was very shallow, although it did make me think about what constituted genuine love.

God's Word tells us in Romans 12:9-16: "*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. . . .*"

It is clear that we are directed to have our love toward one another be genuine. But this is also tied up with the intimate bond we have together as brothers and sisters in Christ. The bond of Christ-like love is tighter than even blood ties. We are bonded together by our almighty Triune God Himself, with the gift of forgiveness of sins from Him as our eternal treasure. As we hear in 1 John 1:7: "*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*"

With this fellowship established on something truly lasting and genuine, we should expect our love to be demonstrated at a deeper level than a mere handshake. Since it is a love founded on the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ, our concern for one another extends to those things that pertain to salvation. Obviously at the core of such brotherly concern are sin and grace! Dealing with these issues within a congregation should and does demonstrate a Christian love that is genuine, not hypocritical.

When the sin of a particular member becomes known within a congregation, many reactions can take place. Perhaps some may wonder how the pastor will handle it. Others may consider it a piece of juicy news to discuss at the next council meeting. Or maybe some begin to dread that the person will now have to be shamed in front of everyone at church. On the other hand, by the congregation not addressing such cases of public sin, the matter may also become the so-called "elephant in the room"—something secret behind the scenes that causes tension to exist. No one may be talking about it, but everyone is thinking about it. As time goes on, there may be those who believe that if such a sin is acceptable for one person, then why not for another? How about even for myself?

An atmosphere like this, with any of these scenarios occurring in the congregation, is never healthy. It puts members on edge. Obviously these are the wrong ways to look at such an issue. Genuine Christian love is based upon the forgiveness each of us has received in Christ Jesus. As such this love is to prevail in handling all such cases.

How different this approach is from the way the world handles public wrongdoing. More often than not, the perceived effectiveness of one's remorse is measured by a public opinion poll. Consider the way the public reacted to the marital indiscretions of Tiger Woods, or even to the Monica Lewinski scandal involving President Clinton. While the world clearly does not understand the importance of genuine repentance, it apparently has an understanding that things ought to be rectified publicly in some manner. Yet without basing the rectifying on the love of Christ, it becomes a very subjective opinion with regard to what constitutes an adequate resolution of the matter.

The apostle Paul reminded the Christian congregation in the city of Ephesus:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (Eph. 2:19-21)

This means that our handling of public sin as Christians is going to be different. We look to the Word of God, which directs hearts and minds to be founded always upon our Savior, Jesus Christ. With that as our focus the Gospel can lead us all to be in quest of the same thing for ourselves and for each other—that we are sinners brought to repentance and experiencing the healing power of His forgiveness bestowed to us in Christ. As God's Word says in Malachi 4:2: "*But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings. . . .*" Great joy can be shared by all who are reconciled to God, as the tension is resolved between sinners and their Savior. Romans 5:11: "*And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*" This isn't an imitation; it's the real thing! It is what our triune God desires to exist for

all within our congregations.

Handling repentance of public sin in our modern day

In the pastoral theology book called *The Shepherd under Christ* the authors define public sins as “sins which have been committed in the presence of the congregation or are a matter of public knowledge and an offense to the congregation.”² One brother offers this distinction in a self-produced tract:

There are “private sins” of which each of us is guilty every day, sins unknown to anyone perhaps but ourselves and God, or our closest family members and God, and so on. And then there are “public sins”—sins manifest or known to others besides ourselves and God.³

In our circles much has been written on the topic of public sin. Perhaps the word most often used to discuss and treat the issue of public sin is “offense,” which is a translation for the Greek word σκάνδαλον.⁴ One writer defines it this way:

When we look at the Greek word used for “offense”⁵ in the New Testament, the expression “occasion of stumbling” is today closer to the real meaning of the original. The word “offense” has come to mean as little as simply hurting another’s feelings. So the Greek word is “stumbling-block” or “death trap.” It refers to any behavior on our part which might cause another to fall into sin and eventually lose his faith.⁶

A number of passages use the word “offense” in this proper sense, which include the following: Matthew 18:7: “*Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!*”

Romans 14:13: *Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block [πρόσκομμα] or a cause to fall [σκάνδαλον] in our brother’s way.*

1 Corinthians 10:32-33: *Give no offense [ἀπρόσκοποι], either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*

1 John 2:10: *He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.*

Over the years confusion has occurred over how the word is used in Scripture in relation to how it is often used in everyday life. To “be offended” is different from the Scriptural concept of “causing offense.”⁷ Someone may be offended if one merely looks at him in what he considers to be the wrong way. Just because one has offended someone else in the everyday sense doesn’t necessarily mean that one has sinned. There is no need for an apology or any kind of repentance after such a claim when sin is not involved. This is probably why many of us are troubled by those who actually flaunt their sin as being acceptable in our society, and then make the empty, sanctimonious claim: “I’m sorry that I offended you.” In a bulletin article for his congregation a brother pastor has observed:

Such a manner of speech basically says, “I said what I said and I meant what I said, but I am sorry you are offended.” Such an apology is not only not an acknowledgment of a wrong, but is rather a veiled suggestion that the real sin is not that of the perpetrator of the word or deed, but of the one who was offended. It’s as if the offended one should not have been so sensitive. It’s as if his being offended becomes the sin.⁸

Giving offense is different. From God’s Word we should conclude that it is dangerous for a Christian brother to cause any fellow Christian to stumble into sin. What each of us does in the presence of others does impact them positively or negatively. One article defines offense as “anything whereby you cast doubt upon your Christianity or cause another to reach the dangerous conclusion: If he can do it, I can do it, too.”⁹ A Christian in a congregation, therefore, is to be conscientious of how public knowledge of his sin could lead others to think it would be acceptable for them to do the same thing.

Clearly there are varying degrees to which a sin could become public. If knowledge of one’s sin is limited to a small group of three or four people, then that’s as public as it has become. If someone’s sin has been broadcasted on the local television station, then that situation becomes public knowledge within the viewing area. If something gets published on the Internet, it becomes public as well. Perhaps not everyone in a congregation will hear about it, but such matters do get shared easily within a community,

large or small. The reality is that it has become public in that anyone could potentially have heard about it.

The extensiveness of how public a sin has become within the congregation may need to be evaluated by its elders. A pastor should be willing to receive counsel from others properly involved in the congregation's soul care. It is also wise to receive counsel from fellow brothers in the ministry. This is not an indication of weakness or incompetence, but rather a step toward gaining additional perspective that proves to be helpful.

An example of a public sin within a small group would be when Peter discredited the Savior's prophecy regarding His sufferings, death, and resurrection, exclaiming, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" While it might have seemed like a private statement, it was necessary for the Lord to rebuke Peter in front of the others as He said in Matthew 16:23: "*Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.*" This open rebuke would not only benefit Peter, but also help the others to understand better the purpose of His redemptive work. Peter again needed a public confrontation, this time by Paul, when he was two-faced in the assembly of the Antioch congregation—first eating with Gentiles, then later separating himself from them in order to please the Jews who had come from Jerusalem (Gal. 2:11-16). Since Peter did this out in the open, it required Paul to respond in kind, in line with what he wrote in 1 Timothy 5:20: "*Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.*"

Did Peter shy away from these public reprimands? Hardly. In fact, at the very beginning of his discipleship we hear him confess publicly to Jesus in the presence of others: "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*" (Luke 5:8). Then in the presence of the same group Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men*" (5:10). As people in need of constant repentance ourselves, we should be mindful of the helpful encouragement for any penitent sinner who has committed any sin, be it private or public, to serve the Lord with gladness—a goal achieved only by an evangelical restoration.

Handling repentance of public sin in our modern day

During my days as an engineer I heard a story told of someone who drafted by hand a crucial blueprint for a transmission. As he began the project, he casually asked one of his colleagues for a metric conversion factor. Not understanding what was at stake, the coworker jokingly gave him an incorrect number. For two weeks the drafter painstakingly worked on his drawing, using the wrong scale, until someone had pointed out that something seemed wrong. While the drawing by all appearances looked like a correct representation of the transmission, it had to be redone.

In Mark 2:17 Jesus said: "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*" With the world impacted and corrupted by sin, Jesus came to address it. During His ministry Jesus continually preached the message of repentance for sinners. As the physician of souls He came to heal the sin illness which had spread to all humankind. He drew sinners to Himself as He brought the healing medication of the Gospel, the Good News that "*in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*" (Eph. 1:7).

Repentance is always to be at the heart of all church discipline. God's Word says in James 5:19-20: "*Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*" This saving goal for the sinner is quite evident in our Savior's steps of church discipline outlined in Matthew 18, where we hear that "*if he hears you, you have gained your brother.*" The apostle Paul had this goal clearly in mind when he addressed the Corinthian congregation about a case that had remained unaddressed in their midst. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:4-5: "*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*" Paul was calling this congregation to act on something known to be public in their midst.¹⁰ But the goal was to save the sinner. This is why we are instructed in pastoral theology: "Brotherly admonition ought to

have only one purpose, that of reclaiming a sinning brother for his own spiritual good and for the glory of the Lord and his church.”¹¹

Unless repentance is the real purpose of how we conduct our ministries and how we handle public sin, the result will be incorrect. One cannot measure the result merely by what appears to be the outcome of an exemplary life or an improvement in behavior. If we are not focused on leading the sinner to repentance, we will meander around the real issue, and the critical outcome—what happens in the heart—could be gravely wrong. If our goal is only to remedy behavior, then the sinner’s heart is unchanged. Any behavioral change that may occur will not be God-pleasing when the love of Christ is not impelling the individual to follow his Lord Jesus with the proper motivation. Also, if our goal is at least to have the sinner make some sort of public amends with the congregation, then the result will be the same. Predicated on acceptance by the congregation, the person may merely do what is necessary in order to please the pastor or others. We, in fact, would contribute in the process to a spirit of hypocrisy in the congregation instead of prompting genuine Christian love and the true recovery of a straying brother.

Genuine Christian love is to be concerned about repentance. As this becomes the focus, resolving the matter will bring true joy, both on the part of the penitent sinner and on the part of the other members in the congregation. After telling the parable of the lost sheep who was found by the shepherd, Jesus claimed in Luke 15:7: *“I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”* The chorus of angels rejoiced as they announced the Savior’s birth to the shepherds. How wonderful their strains in heaven must be as they rejoice at the repentance of merely one sinner! As Christian congregations we will desire to reflect this, even as we pray, *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* As we would rejoice in a family member surviving a terrible car accident, so it would be expected for a fellow Christian to rejoice in a brother being saved from hell.

In one of its bulletins from years gone by, a CLC congregation discussed public sin with the emphasis of Scripture on the resultant joy found in repentance. The bulletin article stated in conclusion:

After reviewing previous attempts in answering this question, namely from the angle of “offense,” and then from the angle of “brotherly love,” the pastor approached the question from a third angle, namely the angle of spontaneous joy in the hearts of true brethren over the sincere repentance of one of their group, who had for a time manifested impenitence, but was then brought to sincere repentance by the Holy Spirit. . . . It was pointed out that this joy should be encouraged by somehow informing the congregation that such sincere repentance had manifestly been achieved by the grace of God, and that the serious threat to that person’s eternal welfare had thereby been graciously averted.¹²

We may ask: Why is there such personal joy found in repentance? Consider David before his confrontation by the prophet Nathan regarding his sins of adultery and murder. He wrote in Psalm 32:3-4: *“When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”* The burden of his troubled conscience and his realization that he had sinned against God had caused severe agony within his soul. The weight of God’s wrath against his unrighteousness brought such anguish that he groaned with bitterness. What a great contrast we note in his reaction, once he had been led to repent of his sin, as he also wrote in Psalm 32:10-11: *“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”*

All Christians have experienced this joy from their Savior God! They understand the great joy found in the forgiveness of Christ. It is the Spirit-worked result of the healing power of that forgiveness. Repeatedly the Scriptures speak of this healing:

Isaiah 57:14b-18: *“Heap it up! Heap it up! Prepare the way, take the stumbling block out of the way of My people.” For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made. For the*

iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners.

Hosea 6:1: “Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up.”

Isaiah 55:7: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

All Christians find healing and thus have joy through the Lord leading them to repentance. Having been overwhelmed with guilt and grief over sin, it comes as a great comfort to them that by the atoning work of Christ things are fully resolved with their merciful God. To apprehend that we have been reconciled to Him makes us truly appreciate the wonders of His grace—for ourselves and for each other!

Handling repentance of public sin in our modern day

Growing up on a farm, I recall a certain part on a piece of equipment that was quite challenging to repair. Because a bolt was located in an area difficult to reach, my father welded a rod to a wrench. I learned to use patiently that wrench in the tight space, slowly but gradually making progress in removing or installing the bolt as needed.

With repentance as the goal leading us in our ministries, we can be grateful that the Lord has given us a special tool, something to use with great patience. Following His resurrection, as the first item on His agenda with His disciples, Jesus gave them the Ministry of the Keys, speaking in John 20:21-23: “*Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, *‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’*”

What a privilege we have to use the Ministry of the Keys today! But with this privilege comes a great responsibility. If a teenager has the keys to his parents’ home, he also has a responsibility. At his own whim he should not lock his siblings out of the house. And he should lock out those who want to use the house for a purpose that his parents would not permit, like a sin-ridden party. Similarly, our Savior intends us to use the Keys He has given to His Church in the way that He desires them to be used. Thus we confess in *Luther’s Small Catechism*:

A Christian congregation, with its pastor, uses the keys according to Christ’s command, either by forgiving those who repent of their sins and are willing to change, or by excluding those who are obviously impenitent from the Christian congregation. These actions are as valid and certain in heaven also as if Christ our dear Lord were dealing with us Himself.. (Sydow Edition 2006)

Jesus had previously in His ministry prepared His disciples for use of the Keys when He said in Matthew 16:19: “*I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. And the door you lock here on earth will already be locked in heaven, and the door you unlock here on earth will already be unlocked in heaven*” (trans. Julian Anderson). It’s vital for us to understand that using the Keys means that we in our congregations are only validating or declaring what God Himself has done for the sinner, either as being penitent or as being impenitent.

Many, if not all, of our congregations have a membership clause in their constitutions. Such a clause will include what this one does from the constitution of Grace, where I presently serve:

Only such may become and remain members and enjoy the right and privileges of communicant membership in this congregation who: ... Permit themselves to be admonished in a brotherly way when they have erred in doctrine or life (Matthew 18:15-18; Galatians 6:1).¹³

It is important for us to be upfront about this in our confirmation and instruction classes. The membership clause reflects and applies what Scripture teaches regarding the function of the Ministry of the Keys. While this doesn’t spell out the entire procedure of how a congregation will handle an issue involving public sin, the steps of church discipline are clearly implied as referenced in Matthew 18.

I recently heard a radio broadcast on the effort of some to enact federal education requirements. A number of educators have attempted to demonstrate that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work

everywhere. The culture is different in Louisiana compared to Minnesota. Linguistic foundational levels, learning styles, and other key factors can vary from one location to the next. This is why local school boards need to be empowered to fashion the educational approach that best fits the students in their districts.

In a similar way a sweeping method or procedure for handling repentance of public sin will not work the same for all of our congregations. There will be differences in how we handle such matters from one congregation to another. Factors affecting our approach may include size of the congregation, its location, cultural differences, the approach historically used by the congregation, and so on. Thus the approach taken at Ascension Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington, may vary from the approach used at Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. In addition, each case of public sin will uniquely present its own challenges. People will even respond in different ways to a similar type of sin. Fruits of repentance will vary among God's people.

That said, with Scripture as our guide the approaches among us will likely have many similarities. In fact, tried and tested methods that have been used historically in confessional Lutheran circles should not be discredited, but seriously considered for our use today. It seems that more and more our society is prone to question traditions and easily discard them. It is wise for us to give respectful consideration to the guidance of our theological fathers.

For instance, C. F. W. Walther writes in his *Pastoral Theology*:

A manifest fall into sin is at the same time a sin against the whole congregation. So a public reconciliation is necessary. . . .

This reconciliation with the whole congregation or public church repentance is necessary, not because a person must pay for his sins in the church as in the state by suffering a corresponding punishment, but partly to restore the trusting relationship to his brothers, which has been disturbed by the fall into sin, and partly to do away as much as possible with the offense which has been given publicly.¹⁴

Consider also Franz Pieper:

[E]veryone who has made his Christianity doubtful for the congregation must, before he communes again, enable the congregation to become convinced that by God's grace he has risen from his fall. Scripture therefore expressly prohibits us to treat as brothers in the faith those who live in gross, offensive sins, that is, to act toward them as though nothing had occurred. . . . If the grave offense of a person has become known to the congregation, also his repentance must be made known to the congregation. . . .¹⁵

In a well-written paper on this subject Waldemar Schuetze comments:

A penitent who is truly sorry for his sin and so, in the privacy of his own heart and with a believing heart, has asked for God's forgiveness, then and there has received forgiveness from God. God's forgiveness is not contingent upon any congregational resolution or absolution. Rather, congregational absolution is contingent upon divine absolution. . . . If an offender, having committed a public sin that is of the nature that it stands as a stumbling block before the congregation, is truly penitent, he will then also want to right things with the congregation, with those whom he has so sorely grieved and who are justly disturbed. He will want to remove the offense. He will seek reconciliation. He will seek congregational absolution.¹⁶

From the same article quoted earlier *The Lutheran Spokesman* presented an approach based on Matthew 5:23-24 ("Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"):

The thought is that true repentance before God also includes that we ask forgiveness of our fellowmen if we have offended them. We cannot truthfully confess our sins to God if, at the same time, we fail to remove any stumbling-blocks we may have placed in our neighbor's path. Christ teaches that we cannot properly approach God in worship as long as we are not reconciled to our neighbor.¹⁷

From another article in *The Lutheran Spokesman* we read:

But it [removing the offense] is necessary also for the peace of mind and conscience of the one who has given the offense. Unless the offender has removed the same as far as he is able to do so, the accusation will always arise in him, as often as some brother falls into the same sin. . . . Furthermore,

if he has done what he can to remove the offense he has given, he need no longer wonder what sort of thoughts his fellow-believers in the congregation are thinking about him. They in turn can show their loving concern for him by freely assuring him of God's forgiveness and their own, making his lot that much easier to bear.¹⁸

From such counsel it makes sense that if a particular sin has become public knowledge and the sinner has been led to repent of that sin, then somehow the repentance is to be communicated publicly as well. Christians are not to live or worship in isolation from each other. Christian love binds a congregation together. As such there is to be genuine care and concern for all involved—for the sinner and for all those who may know about the sin. Perhaps most importantly, as the penitent sinner has found healing through the Savior's atoning work, so there is healing found among those with whom he is joined together in Christ Jesus. They are not there to bring further shame to the sinner, for they also realize that Jesus has redeemed them from their own sins. As repentance has brought about resolution and reconciliation in the relationship one has with his Savior, so there can and should be resolution and reconciliation in the relationships one has with his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The congregation can move forward together in genuine Christian love.

Consideration should also be given as to how extensively public the sin has become. A good adage to go by is: "As far as the sin is known, so far repentance should also be known."¹⁹ Or as it has also been expressed in *The Lutheran Spokesman*:

The fact of repentance must become known at least to the ones who have been affected by the sin: if God alone, then to Him; if one neighbor only, then to him; if a group of brethren, then to them; if an entire congregation, then to the congregation. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." (Luke 15:10)²⁰

Various approaches are possible as a way to provide adequate announcement of such repentance:

- ➔ The person (or a representative) reading a letter in front of the congregation after worship;
- ➔ The pastor making an oral announcement or reading a letter following worship;
- ➔ A written announcement in the bulletin to the congregation;
- ➔ Pastor and elders filing away a letter in case a situation becomes more public;
- ➔ An oral report or letter brought to the elders and/or church council and/or voters;
- ➔ An announcement in a meeting among only those who are aware of the sin.
- ➔ Considering notice given to another impacted or to a nearby fellow congregation if necessary;

Perhaps of more importance than the announcement itself is the way the pastor prepares for it. First of all, counseling the penitent sinner is to be done evangelically and very carefully. The person being counseled should never get the idea that he is to confess publicly in order to rectify his sin. That would create the errant idea that this is a work-righteous deed to get settled with God and the congregation.²¹ Remind the person how he has found great healing from the Lord Jesus and how comforting it is to know that things are settled between him and his Lord. Inform him that he can also be comforted by his fellow brothers and sisters in the congregation. Since they are already aware of the sin, it would be wise and beneficial also to gain healing from them. Remind the person that they do not stand as judges to condemn him further, but by being public with his repentance, he is taking away any tension in the congregation that exists as a result of the sin. Having damaged his reputation due to the public nature of his sin, instruct him that the Lord seeks to protect it in the Eighth Commandment and that in announcing repentance to them, a congregation in Christian love will look favorably on anyone with a repentant heart. Since, having repented, the member can now live before God without shame, he may also now do the same before his fellow sinner-saints in the congregation. Share God's Word, particularly what is written in James 5:16: "*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*"

Just as the penitent sinner is so counseled, it would be very wise that a few points be made publicly to the congregation as well, serving as a preface to any announcement:

- This announcement is not made to shame the penitent sinner publicly.
- None of us should gloat or think we are holier in any way.
- This is not done as some sort of penance or way to satisfy God or the church for having done

wrong.

- This is a vivid reminder of the repentance we all are to have over all sins in our lives, whether public or private.
- There is great joy in heaven among the angels of God over such repentance.
- Our joy in the congregation would naturally follow.
- While the person has found healing, resolution, and reconciliation with God, he desires healing, resolution, and reconciliation with his fellow Christians also.
- We now have an opportunity to show our Christian love and encouragement to the person.

Handling repentance of public sin *in our modern day*

In the early 1970s one of our pastors wrote: “Sin, whether private or public, has not gone out of style, nor will it.”²² Around the same time another brother said: “We cannot let the calloused indifference of the age influence us into taking sin lightly, or ignoring it completely, lest we, too, become castaways.”²³

Public sins happen today as they did years ago. We grant, in addition, that today more sin has become public due to what is publicized on the Internet. Many think they can hide behind online anonymity, and thus they become quite bold in the things they say and do online compared to what they might do in someone else’s presence. Even when they have a clear online identity, it seems that many are not hesitant to express their displeasure with someone else or to slander others openly. It can be akin to getting up to the microphone at the CLC Convention and broadcasting a statement about someone in front of the entire group. There is no denying how public this is, and yet it has one big difference. You may say something in the microphone at Convention, but it isn’t likely to be stored forever on a computer server someplace. Not unless someone with a smartphone is recording you at the moment and does something with the recording. What is typed or stated digitally is stored digitally.

Some years ago my oldest daughter asked permission to open a Facebook account. I really didn’t know what it was, but had heard of MySpace at the time. I took a leisurely Sunday afternoon stroll on the Internet to see what it was all about. One link led me to another. Pretty soon I had found several of our young people’s MySpace accounts and was appalled by what I found: sexual innuendos, cursing, raunchy pictures, etc. Furthermore, many of the accounts I came across were young people I held in high regard. Some were pastors’ children, and some my own members.²⁴

While some of us in the ministry may not be involved in social media, it is still something we need to address with our youth in catechetical instruction. Social media is not sinful in and of itself. There is much good one can do with it, such as keeping up with friends who live at a distance, or staying in touch with your family. But what can be a blessing the devil turns into his turf. It is clear that social media has also become a playground for public sin. It would be wise for us to be acquainted with the trends emerging in social media, how people use these forums, and which ones are popular: Facebook, MySpace,²⁵ Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Pinterest, Google+, LinkedIn, SnapChat, etc. Our young people need to be aware that what they put on the Internet will be there for the long-term. They need to understand that their presence on the Internet is a witness of who and what they are as Christians, especially in consideration of our Savior’s instruction in Matthew 5:16: “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*” To do otherwise has the potential of becoming a sin of public knowledge, and harming their reputation before their friends, the world, their family, their church, and their Savior. With access to the Internet and its social world now in the palm of their hands by way of smartphones, the power that today’s young people have is considerable. This is something parents need to weigh cautiously before allowing their children to be “connected.” Children need to understand that it’s a privilege to use their phones, but along with that privilege comes a great responsibility to use them in a God-pleasing manner.

In September a 12-year-old girl committed suicide in Florida after falling prey to cyber-bullying through online social media. She had left one school the year prior, but somehow the trend followed her and continued at her new school. *The New York Times* reports:

. . . Rebecca became one of the youngest members of a growing list of children and teenagers apparently driven to suicide, at least in part, after being maligned, threatened and taunted online, mostly through a new collection of texting and photo-sharing cellphone applications. Her suicide raises new questions about the proliferation and popularity of these applications and Web sites among children and the ability of parents to keep up with their children's online relationships.

For more than a year, Rebecca, pretty and smart, was cyberbullied by a coterie of 15 middle-school children who urged her to kill herself, her mother said. . . .

Rebecca was "absolutely terrorized on social media," Sheriff Grady Judd of Polk County said at a news conference this week.²⁶

These disturbing trends with smartphones and all such mobile devices apply to people of all ages. With the technology available today public sin can occur quite easily and quite rapidly. As a society we all need to realize that anything we email, text, tweet, put on Facebook, etc., can so easily "go viral."²⁷ This can include not merely what is typed, but also pictures and video. So even if one isn't in possession of a mobile device, a bystander can capture what others do and then share it, the activity thus becoming public knowledge even if unintended.

Another consideration about the Internet is how it may impact things we publish as a church. Doing a Google search for the name of one of my members, I discovered that one of my bulletins had been searchable. This means that what we publish should be recognized as being out there for the world to see. Since repentance of public sin is really an intimate matter within the congregation, we need to be mindful of public videotaping and publicizing of bulletins and/or congregational minutes on the Internet. Names of individuals could easily be found on the Internet in such cases. A congregational matter need not be used against an individual in the domain of the world—for example, in a job interview or on a college application.

With the changing world in which we live, perhaps a warning is in order from pastors to members that congregational affairs other than those intended to be public, like the worship service, should not be accessible to online social media. With the advent of smartphones equipped with video cameras, nearly everything we do nowadays in a church service may have the potential of being broadcast worldwide. I am confident that most of our people are aware of the sensitivities regarding such matters. But there is always the potential that a visitor at church may not understand this.

Conclusion:

In the sci-fi story *Blade Runner* humanoid replicants appeared like ordinary humans. The plot revealed how such imitations may seem real, but they still have their disingenuous features. Even as genetic engineers manipulate the human genome in hopes of improving medical care, debate has raised questions as to where this may lead us, with potentially little being real anymore. There is no question as to how important it is for genuine Christian love to be prevalent in our congregations. But if we avoid implementing church discipline and addressing public sin, then the result will be a disingenuous group of people who are not any different from many other contemporary churches.

In Christ Jesus we have received the ministry of reconciliation. We have the opportunity to direct penitent sinners to a reconciled relationship with their Savior God and with their fellow Christians. In doing so, the Gospel message produces spiritual healing and great joy. With sound Christian judgment and wisdom being applied, let this be the basis of our **handling repentance of public sin our modern day.**

2 Corinthians 5:18-21: Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Endnotes

- ¹ All Scripture quotations in this essay, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version.
- ² Armin Schuetze and Irwin Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, 2nd Ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1981) 172.
- ³ Paul Fleischer, “Public Sin” (tract), August 1995.
- ⁴ Paul Schaller, “Offense” (Great Lakes Pastoral Conference paper), 2004.
- ⁵ Friberg on σκάνδαλον: 1. strictly, the movable bait stick or trigger in a trap *trap stick*; by synecdoche, the trap itself *a snare*; 2. metaph. *trap*, i.e. *what causes a person to sin, cause of ruin, occasion of falling* (Rom. 11:9); 3. fig. (a) an *enticement* to sin or apostasy *temptation, offense* (Matt. 18:7); (b) what gives offense or arouses opposition *stumbling block, offense* (1 Cor. 1:23).
- ⁶ “What Constitutes Public Offense?” (pastoral conference paper), author unknown.
- ⁷ For further distinction in these two areas of giving offense vs. taking offense, see the essay of Paul Tiefel, Jr.: “A Study of the Public Removal of Public Offense,” written as a Great Lakes Pastoral Conference paper in 1997.
- ⁸ Daniel Fleischer, bulletin article for Resurrection Lutheran Church of Corpus Christi, TX; April 27, 2008.
- ⁹ Elton Hallauer, “Public Offense and Its Removal,” *The Lutheran Spokesman* 15.2 (Aug. 1972): 9.
- ¹⁰ Frank Gantt, “Dealing with Public Offense” (essay for the West-Central Pastoral Conference), 2002.
- ¹¹ Schuetze-Habeck 169.
- ¹² George Barthels, bulletin article for Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sleepy Eye, MN; February 19, 1978.
- ¹³ “Constitution of Grace Lutheran Church—Fridley, MN.”
- ¹⁴ C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, trans. John Drickamer (New Haven, MO: Lutheran News, 1995) 244.
- ¹⁵ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953) 3:384.
- ¹⁶ Waldemar Schuetze, “Is a Penitent’s Public Confession for a Public Offense a Requirement for Congregational Absolution” (pastoral conference paper from the 1970s).
- ¹⁷ Hallauer 11.
- ¹⁸ H. C. Duehlmeier, “Offense and Its Removal,” *The Lutheran Spokesman* 28.2 (Aug. 1985): 7.
- ¹⁹ Paul Tiefel, Jr., “A Study of the Public Removal of Public Offense” (Great Lakes Pastoral Conference paper), 1997.
- ²⁰ Hallauer 11.
- ²¹ Cf. *Concordia—The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005) Article VI, ¶16, p. 173.
- ²² Hallauer 10.
- ²³ Gilbert Sydow, “Sin-Consciousness III,” *The Lutheran Spokesman* 14.8 (Feb. 1972): 13.
- ²⁴ Some instances have involved a group consisting of members from different CLC congregations. This can potentially weave together cases of public sin in such a way that dealing with them could be complex. One case involved a video made by one of my members. He adamantly defended the sin that was exhibited. He had considered it mere acting and not necessarily being involved in the action of the sin. So cursing, sexual innuendoes, and nasty connotations were said to be legitimate in his opinion. He explained it as being no different than a murder scene at an ILC play.
- ²⁵ Jason DeMers, “The Top 7 Social Media Marketing Trends That Will Dominate 2014”; accessed at www.forbes.com (Sept. 24, 2013).
- MySpace may not be as outdated as one might think. It is rising again in popularity with teenagers.
- ²⁶ Lizette Alvarez, “Girl’s Suicide Points to Rise in Apps Used by Cyberbullies,” *The New York Times*, 13 Sept. 2013. Accessed at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/14/us/suicide-of-girl-after-bullying-raises-worries-on-web-sites.html?page-wanted=all&_r=0.
- ²⁷ *Urban Dictionary*: “go viral”— used in reference to Internet content which can be passed through electronic mail and social networking sites (Facebook, etc.): an image, video, or link that spreads rapidly through a population by being frequently shared with a number of individuals has ‘gone viral.’ In other words, a link goes viral because most of the people who get it forward it to their Friends list or post it in their online status. Strong political content, celebrity news, news of disasters, America’s Funniest Home videos, and crude sexual humor are popular topics to go viral.
-

**Use and Misuse of the Term “In God’s Eyes”
Especially as It Pertains to Marriage and Divorce**
Michael Roehl

Introduction

One of the great benefits of our Christian fellowship is peer review. Brothers who share our Christian faith and confession sift through our words and gently offer both encouragement and criticism—both of which are immensely valuable. More than that, every such review represents a great gift from our God and a vital process for any synod that hopes to remain orthodox. God has richly blessed His servants with a variety of different gifts—which means, in part, that each reads doctrinal writings from a unique perspective and with a variety of unique insights, background, and experience. The result is often that what is unseen by one is recognized by another. It can also identify unintended consequences.

We recall from the December 2012 issue of the *Journal* an article written by the undersigned (*Journal* 52:12, pp. 24-40), which had the title “The Proper Understanding of Matthew 5:32, Matthew 19:9, and Luke 16:18 in Their Relation to Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage.” At the time of publication the writer and the editorial staff of the *Journal of Theology* were not aware of some reservation expressed in certain circles of our fellowship regarding the use of the term “*still married in God’s eyes*.” Given the questions and concerns raised, it became apparent that a more thorough exploration of that term and its use among us would be in order.

Certainly it must be granted that language and terminology are capable of evolving. Words and phrases routinely used in the past can and do take on a different connotation as usage and meaning go through change. The challenge, of course, is to express theological truth in the clearest possible terms without disallowing that the same truth can be expressed in other ways. In Christian love we seek to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), always in the manner that best communicates that truth to the reader or listener. Sanctified Christian judgment will have to play a role here, as will the individual’s level of understanding of the ever-shifting nature of the English language.

What this means, on the one hand, is that it is neither safe nor wise to continue to use terminology that is routinely misunderstood by a significant segment of the population or, at least, by a significant number of those whom we are serving. Few in our circles, for example, would express his hope for salvation by saying: “I am going to heaven because I have accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior.” Clearly these words could be rightly explained and understood, but most avoid their use because of their common misuse by those with a synergistic view of conversion. On the other hand, we also seek to resist the temptation to limit doctrinal statements to synod-approved modes of expression—a practice that lends itself to dead orthodoxy.

In the following article, therefore, we will attempt to clarify the use of the term “*in God’s eyes*,” with special emphasis on the term as it relates to marriage and divorce. The specific question we seek to address is this: When, if ever, is it advisable to speak of a married couple as “*still married in God’s eyes*”?

The proper use of the term “*in God’s eyes*”

There is no argument in our circles that the term “*in God’s eyes*,” in and of itself, can be used and understood correctly. In secular jurisprudence, for example, there is an oft-cited expression that “possession is nine tenths (or points) of the law.” In other words, the default position of the law is that possession implies ownership, and the burden of proof is thus resting on any claim to the contrary. Obviously God sees things differently. In His omniscience God is not swayed in His knowledge of the truth by outward appearance or circumstance. Mere possession, therefore, does nothing to establish ownership “*in God’s eyes*.”

Perhaps even more germane to the specific question under discussion are the various state laws regarding “adverse possession,” including the prolonged and unchallenged use of or occupancy on real

property. To prevent the impossible legal tangle that would result, the heirs or descendants of former property owners or lien holders are not permitted to gain or regain control of real property that has been occupied by another for a legally established period of time. While clearly necessary, such laws can and are routinely abused. Court cases abound in which individuals illegally used or occupied the property of another and were subsequently granted ownership of that property by the courts.

Such cases are applicable to the topic under discussion for at least two reasons. First, *in God's eyes* the property was stolen and must be returned or the rightful owner compensated; and second, *in God's eyes* the title to the land has, in fact, been transferred to the one who stole it. These two facts obviously present challenges for pastoral soul care. Both the sin and the reality of the state's legal right to transfer title have to be acknowledged. Yet the former is in no way mitigated by the latter. Title *has* been transferred, but such legal action does nothing to assuage the guilt of the offense. In such a case the legal transfer of the property does not effect forgiveness for the sin *in God's eyes*.

Is there, then, any circumstance under which the term "in God's eyes" has application in the area of marriage and divorce? Is there ever a time or circumstance where man might consider a marriage to have ended while God does not? I believe we can say that there is. A couple, for example, may have an argument and in the heat of the moment declare that the marriage is over, with one or both driving off in anger, only to cool down and return some hours later. Barring marital unfaithfulness, God does not regard the marriage bond to have been broken by impetuous words spoken in the heat of an argument. In His eyes the couple continued to be married.

It is also not uncommon for one or both spouses to file for divorce, but also to continue to counsel with their pastor in an effort to reconcile. No matter what either spouse may think in such situations, in God's eyes they are still married and would be counseled (and should act) accordingly.

When Jesus counseled the Samaritan woman at the well near Sychar, He made reference to the woman's five husbands and then concluded by saying: "*And the one whom you now have is not your husband*" (John 4:18). Although the woman did not consider herself to be married to the man with whom she was living, had she assumed it to be so would not have altered how God regarded her current living arrangement. A growing number of young people today are not nearly as forthright in their own living arrangements. Many will declare their marital status according to the situation at hand. The ever-evolving Affordable Care Act (ACA) is helping to expose this hypocrisy. Since the ACA in its present form penalizes married couples with higher premiums, individuals who are living together without ever having satisfied the state's obligations concerning marriage are happy to list their marital status as "single." Yet many of those same couples will also, when confronted by family or fellow Christians, argue that their mutual commitment means that they are in essence "married in God's eyes." Clearly it cannot be both, and pastors will counsel according to how God sees any given relationship.

In fact, the term "still married in God's eyes" has great value in the counseling setting. Bitterness and anger tend to create false realities in the setting of troubled marriages. Christians, however, through the guidance and influence of Scripture will always attempt to see every situation as God sees it, which is often at odds with man's view and the inclinations of one's flesh.

The improper use of the term "*in God's eyes*"

The fact that a word or term can be used correctly does not mean that it can never be used or understood *incorrectly*. Nor does it mean that we should continue to use a term or expression that is prone to misunderstanding. Our calling as God's ambassadors will mean that we continue to use great care both in what we say and particularly in what we write, if we are to avoid creating or perpetuating false impressions. Where, then, does that leave us with the term "still married in God's eyes"?

God has granted to the state certain rights and obligations that must be acknowledged and honored by all, especially by Christians. Christians recognize that no authority exists except that which has been ordained by God. John 19:10-11 is to the point: "*So Pilate said to him, 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. .*

.” (ESV). Also Romans 13:1: **“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God”** (ESV).

Such oversight exists also in the area of marriage and divorce. No one in our fellowship would deny the state’s right to require that certain conditions be met before a couple is to be regarded as legally married—including, for example, a marriage license, a blood test, and a ceremony conducted by an authorized representative of the state. Since marriage carries with it certain legal implications—such as taxes, Social Security, pensions, and child custody—the state has the God-given right to regulate the institution that God Himself has ordained. Such oversight exists both as to when a marriage begins and also when it ends.

Some have argued, somewhat incongruously, that while the state does have a say in regulating the front end of a marriage (its establishment or beginning), it does not have the right to regulate the back end (its termination or declaration of divorce). Under normal circumstances, if the state has the right to regulate the beginning of a marriage, it also has the right to regulate the end of a marriage. Exceptions to this rule do not nullify the rule itself. If, for example, persecution of Christians in a country were to grow to the point that its government abruptly declared all marriages performed by Christian pastors to be null and void, that would not alter how God views such marriage bonds, which would certainly remain intact in His eyes.

Again, unique exceptions to principles do not invalidate those principles. It is never accurate, therefore, to apply the term “still married in God’s eyes” to a marriage that the state has, at the legal request of one or both spouses, declared to be broken by the declaration of divorce. Under such circumstances it would be improper to apply the term “still married in God’s eyes” to such a situation and to continue to act or think of the broken marriage as a bond that still exists.

It remains an open question among us, however, as to whether a marriage is terminated (not just in a legal sense but in God’s eyes) by the actions of the state (Decree of Divorce) or by the fact that the finalized divorce is the evidence that one or both spouses have deserted the marriage. One position holds that even a sinful action on the part of the state is nonetheless binding, and therefore if the state issues a Decree of Divorce, God also sees the marriage bond as having been broken.

Proponents of this position cite a congregation’s termination of a divine call by way of illustration. It is accepted in our fellowship that when a congregation terminates a divine call, even for unscriptural reasons, that call has nonetheless been ended. We acknowledge the fact that the call has been terminated, even while we address the sinful actions of the congregation. The application to marriage is that the state’s decree of divorce ends the marriage, even though sin is involved.

The two actions, however, would only be analogous if a third party—such as a government entity—took it upon itself the attempt to terminate a divine call. No one in our fellowship would grant the state that right, which means that no one among us would acknowledge that a divine call has been terminated based solely on the arbitrary actions of the state. Like a marriage, a divine call is a reciprocal relationship between two parties—either one of which possess the power to end that relationship by their sinful actions. God ordained both relationships, but God also identified how man can and cannot terminate those relationships. We have not granted the state the right—legally or morally—to terminate either relationship. Nor does the state assume that right. Yet this is exactly what we would have to grant if we were to hold that the state’s decree of divorce is that which, in and of itself, ends a marriage.

This proposal (that the declaration of the state—in and of itself—ends a marriage) raises several difficulties. If, as mentioned previously, the state were arbitrarily to declare all marriages performed by Christian pastors to be invalid and issue a Decree of Divorce dissolving all such marriage bonds, proponents of this position would have to grant that God would also then be bound to regard all such couples as divorced. It is difficult to envision how such a scenario would alter God’s view. If such a thing were to occur, Christian couples would need to satisfy the new state regulations, but those same couples would certainly not be guilty of fornication or adultery in the interim. Nothing in Scripture would compel us to acknowledge that God regards such marriage bonds as broken. Such a scenario would also invalidate our universally accepted maxim that *every divorce involves sin on the part of one or both spouses*.

It is also not unheard of for a wedding officiant to fail to file a marriage license by the prescribed deadline, or even at all. In such cases it cannot be stipulated that the couple is living in sin, despite the fact that the state does not regard them as legally married. While perhaps not completely analogous to a divorce decree, this scenario again calls into question the position that God's view of marriage is always bound by the actions or position of the state.

No such tensions exist when we acknowledge that a Decree of Divorce ends a marriage—not simply because the state has so declared, but because such a decree serves as irrefutable evidence that one or both spouses have indeed deserted the marriage. Here we are on solid, Scriptural footing, since we are relying on what God Himself says concerning that which ends a marriage in His sight.

It is helpful to note that whether a marriage bond is broken by the declaration of the state or by the desertion of one or both spouses, we are agreed that the marriage bond is indeed broken. There is no scenario by which, following a divorce, either party in the divorce could rightly make the claim that the marriage bond is still intact “in God's eyes.” We note 1 Corinthians 7:15: “***But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. . .***” (ESV). Whether by the state's decree or by sinful desertion, the marriage bond has indeed been broken. The desire of one spouse to remain married does not, in itself, establish or maintain a marriage. No discussion given in Scripture concerning what actually breaks the marriage bond alters the fact that the bond is broken. In much the same way theologians have long struggled to identify Eve's first sin. Whether it was a failure to defer to her husband's headship, or lust, greed, pride, or simply eating the forbidden fruit, or some other sin, the salient point is that at some point Eve sinned, and then Adam with her. No discussion in Scripture concerning how Eve first sinned alters the fact that she did—and that she thereby broke the perfect bond that she had previously enjoyed with her Lord. So also here, whether ended by the state's declaration or by desertion, the final outcome is that a sinful end of the marriage has occurred.

It is also helpful to recognize the difference between the secular/legal and the spiritual/moral ramifications of the state's actions. If the governing authorities passed laws requiring all who had previously been married by a Christian pastor to complete an additional set of requirements—including a ceremony before a secular state official—Christians would comply, but that compliance would only carry secular and legal ramifications. Only those who are legally married can, for example, file joint income tax returns, qualify for death or survivor benefits, and claim other rights and benefits legally guaranteed to a surviving spouse. The state, therefore, has both the right and the obligation legally to define who is and who is not married. God, however, is not bound by the actions of the state. If it were otherwise, Acts 5:29 (“***We must obey God rather than men***”) would have no practical application.

Conclusion

As language and terminology continue to change, Christians will have challenges in their struggle to communicate truth clearly and unambiguously. When a term is misunderstood as often as it is understood correctly, its usefulness has probably come to an end.

Have we reached that point with the phrase “still married in God's eyes”? No matter how any given shepherd would answer that question, all would agree that it is misunderstood at least often enough to warrant great care and clarity if or when it is used.

Certainly it is a hallmark of an orthodox synod continually to reevaluate every tried-and-true expression of truth in an ongoing effort to communicate God's precious truths faithfully and clearly—all without becoming stale, ostentatious, or arcane.

Book Review

Robert J. Koester: *The Spirit of Pietism*, Northwestern Publishing House, 2013, paperback, 422 pages and 8 preliminary pages.

Confessional Lutherans, no doubt, would agree that orthodoxy and piety are good things. But if orthodoxy becomes *orthodoxyism* and piety becomes *Pietism*, then that which is good has become not

good. Is there such a thing as orthodoxism? In the early stages of the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), Professor Edmund Reim warned against what he called "*Lehrgerechtigkeit*," which means that a person depends on his orthodoxy for salvation rather than on Christ Jesus and His living, dying, rising, and ruling for us sinners. Those who taught that one must belong to the orthodox Lutheran church for salvation were most likely guilty of orthodoxism. C. F. W. Walther warned against these teachers in his Friday evening lectures on the distinction between Law and Gospel. His Thesis XX states that "the Word of God is not rightly divided when a person's salvation is made to depend on his association with the visible orthodox Church and when salvation is denied to every person who errs in any article of faith" (*Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, trans. Dau, p. 4).

Through the years a more extensive and pervasive threat has come in the form of Pietism, which originated in Lutheran circles in 17th-century Germany and is still influential today, especially in American church bodies that have a Scandinavian origin, such as the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren. For this reason we appreciate *The Spirit of Pietism* by Robert Koester, who has edited two other books on Pietism, both available from Northwestern Publishing House. These are *The History of Pietism* and *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*.

In Part One of his study Koester presents the historical background emerging in 17th-century Germany, which led to the beginnings of Pietism. Various reasons for the rise of Pietism have been suggested, such as the state church system, dereliction of duty on the part of orthodox preachers, and the general decline in morality among the people. Koester examines all of these topics and presents what he considers the main elements that brought about the rise of Pietism in the past and can still promote a reversion to Pietism today. He writes: "Two distinct emphases developed in German Lutheranism, an analytical (fostered by the philosophical approach to doctrine) and a devotional. Humanly speaking, such a development is quite natural. Some people have more of an inward, mystical bent, while others are more analytical. Yet, Scripture is neither one nor the other, nor is it a combination of both. Rather, it rises above both and creates something completely new in the Christian's heart. The Holy Spirit teaches us the message about Christ, the vine, which enables us, the branches, to bear fruit. The gospel makes us new people. A Christian's subsequent growth in faith cannot rely on the law. It must always go back to where it started. When people begin to speak in ways other than the Holy Spirit speaks, emphasizing philosophical analysis or mysticism, Christianity has lost some of its spiritual nature" (p. 84).

The Lutheran dogmatists got away from the spirit of Scripture by introducing philosophical language and methodology into the study of theology instead of following the pattern of Scripture. The Lutheran devotional writers got away from the spirit of Scripture by their emphasis on examining the state of their hearts instead of on the objective facts of Christ's redemptive work. Koester concludes: "As strongly as the Pietists later protested that they and not the orthodox were the true descendants of Luther, they were the ones who departed from the faith and life that he taught and lived" (p. 84).

Of special interest are Koester's comments on how confessional Lutherans today can withstand the inroads of pietism: "Unless pastors receive training in understanding Scripture and in preaching and teaching it, all is lost. And unless they love it with all their hearts, having learned it from teachers who love it with all their hearts, confessional Lutheranism will die. Unless pastors value the gospel as the church's greatest treasure—for its own sake as God's declaration of forgiveness and not because of the morality it produces—Lutheranism will go the way of Pietism" (p. 112).

Part Two of Koester's book presents a detailed study of the lives and deeds of Pietism's two most influential leaders. The reader is introduced to Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705), generally regarded as the father of the Pietist Movement, and to August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), the organizer and expander of the Pietist Movement. For Spener the gospel became a tool for the advance of reform and a servant of the law. Koester writes: "The message of forgiveness was being undermined in the interest of a more righteous church" (p. 165). Francke was a powerful leader in his own right, but according to Koester, "his theology was largely legalistic and failed to promote a true understanding of the gospel. . ." (p. 245). Of note are the words of Zinzendorf that "by the time of Francke's death in 1727, it [Pietism] had reached its zenith. At that time it dominated the church and ruled the theological scene. . ." (p. 245).

Part Three introduces the reader to Valentin Loescher (1673-1749)—the "Last Great Champion of Lutheran orthodoxy," says Koester—and to his major writing, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*.

Loescher was most concerned with the doctrinal errors of Pietism, which have to do with the means of grace, sanctification, millennialism, and adiaphora. The questions concerning adiaphora are perhaps of greatest concern to us today. Koester lists as adiaphora such things as “drinking, playing cards, dancing, joking, engaging in idle conversation, and going to theatrical performances” (p. 345), and then he says of the Pietists: “The danger of abuse led them to reject the idea that something can be used properly. This led to the Pietists claiming there were no adiaphora at all. The use of anything in God’s creation became a moral issue, and because of the danger of sin, or because they believed such things could not be done completely to the glory of God, they were sin” (p. 346).

Loescher was unable to lead the Lutherans to a resurgence of orthodoxy. Both the orthodox and the Pietists succumbed to the powerful forces of rationalism that began to take over education and church life in the 1700s.

Koester’s comments on Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) are of interest: The composer “has been accused of being subjective and a Pietist. But even a cursory look at the texts of his cantatas shows that he incorporated good subjectivism in them. In his cantatas, the soul expresses all its yearnings—all the Christian ‘psychology’ in which the Pietists indulged—yet the problems always returned to the root problem, his sin, and he always found his answer in the objective truths of God’s gospel promises” (pp. 389-390).

In his conclusion Koester points to C. F. W. Walther and C. M. Zorn, who survived their experiences with rationalism and Pietism in Germany and became staunch defenders of orthodoxy and piety in the United States. By God’s grace may we follow their example in our own day.

- David Lau