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Are We Preaching a Gospel Free from Law?

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EDITORIAL NOTE. This article represents a conference paper read in October 1957 to the Oregon Pastoral Conference. We gladly accede to the request of the conference that the paper be published in this journal. We hope that it may stimulate discussions in other conferences on a subject that is of vital concern to every preacher who would "rightly handle the word of truth." A brief bibliography is appended to the article.

LET us state the question which heads this paper more specifically: *When we speak of the Gospel (grace, forgiveness of sin, Cross of Christ, Christ Crucified), is it permissible to mix elements of the Law into this concept?* One would like to view this question as rhetorical, having for its answer the strongest possible negative. In view of its subject matter, however, one is left with a sense of that kind of interrogative which anticipates a negative answer yet searches deeply for whatever reason may motivate it.

The question relates to the vital center of the Christian proclamation, defined in our Lutheran Confessions as "the Word of God" (in its material definition), that is, the Gospel of Christ, the doctrine of justification, or its equivalent: the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.

The question is vital to everything in the church. Where this Word of truth is rightly handled and Law and Gospel truly distinguished, preached, taught, and applied, there the Gospel will be and remain a means of God's Spirit to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the holy Christian Church on earth. When this is not done, the cardinal Christian message is stained and sullied through a carnal use of the Law, and its kerygmatic strength and Kingdom-building power become unhinged from God's pillar of truth, His self-revelation in Christ Jesus. This is the article with which the church stands or falls.

Vital and practical to the church at all times, the question has particular timeliness for us today. For this is an era of revolution more universal than any the world has experienced. A civilization known in history as the Modern Age, with a span of about 500 years, is being laid to rest in the dust of time. Much of its ideology and institutions, in which at long last a decadent generation has woven itself for security, is being sloughed off like a cocoon, as transient as the past to which it belongs. The ideas, concepts of society, and philosophical formulations of that Modern Age are either being discarded or clothed with new meaning. Our dictionaries must be brought up to date every decade. Any church that comes to grips with the world and its problems today is constrained to find expression for its Gospel theologically, confessionally, and kerygmatically in thought patterns that are not obsolete but current, even colloquial, *Koine*, if you will.

Temptation impends upon the church at this point to clothe even such basic Biblical concepts as Law and Gospel, sin and grace, righteousness and holiness, justification and sanctification, with new, unscriptural connotation.

In this situation we must be doubly alert to our heritage of Gospel truth and our commission to transmit it intact to our fellow men. To this end it behooves us to clarify, for ourselves and for the church and the world to which we speak, our Gospel witness and its doctrinal expression.

I

THE QUESTION AND ITS CONCEPTS DEFINED

Dictionary

Definitions of Gospel

"*Gospel*, *n.* [ME, *godspell* . . .; AS. *godspel*, orig., good spell, good story, good news; intended as transl. of Greek *euangelion*, good tidings], 1. the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. 2. the history of the life and teachings of Jesus. 3. [G-], any of the first four books of the New Testament, ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. 4. [G-], an excerpt from any of these books read in a religious service. 5. a belief or body of beliefs proclaimed as absolutely true. 6. any doctrine or rule of conduct widely maintained." (Webster's New World Dictionary. College Edition)

Lexico-Exegetical

“εὐαγγέλιον: orig. a *reward for good news*, then simply *good news*. . . . In our literature only in the specific sense God’s *good news* to men, the *Gospel*.” It is used absolutely for the “Gospel of Christ.” Frequently it is made dependent on another noun by which the “good news” concept is further defined, e. g., “the Word of the Gospel,” “the mystery of the Gospel,” “the truth of the Gospel,” “the hope of the Gospel,” “the faith of the Gospel.” It is also more fully explained by various genitives, e. g., “the Gospel of the Kingdom,” “the Gospel of God,” “the Gospel of God’s grace,” “the Gospel of peace,” “the Gospel of salvation,” “the Gospel of the glory of Christ,” “the Gospel of Christ.” (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich s. v. εὐαγγέλιον)

Ecclesiastical Definitions

Formula of Concord: “The Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man, who has not observed the Law and therefore is condemned by it, is to believe, namely, that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and has obtained and acquired for him without any merit of his, forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.” (Epitome, V, 5)

Concordia Cyclopaedia: “The Gospel is the message of good will by which the pardon procured for all men through the atoning work of Christ is announced to the world. It is termed ‘the Gospel of the grace of God,’ Acts 20, 24, because it flows from God’s free love and mercy; ‘the Gospel of Christ,’ Rom. 1, 16, because Jesus Christ is the heart and center of it; ‘the Gospel of peace and salvation,’ Rom. 11, 15; Eph. 1, 13, because it publishes peace with God to the penitent and believing, and is the means of their salvation.” (1927 ed., p. 296)

Religious Bodies of America: This book, by F. E. Mayer, is replete with beautiful expressions of the Christian Gospel.

In the hours of despair Staupitz turned Luther away from his sin, from the inadequacy of his monastic life, from an arbitrary decree of election, to “the wounds of Christ.” In his previous experience Luther had seen Christ only as a new Legislator; the Gospel as a “new law,” with countless “evangelical counsels”; the righteous-

ness of God only as God's condemning and punitive justice. But when Luther beheld "the wounds of Christ," then he saw the Scriptures in an entirely new light, as Gospel, as good news. Christ became the focal point through which he now saw the concepts *justification, justify, righteousness of God*. (Page 126; 2d ed., p. 128)

"The inward struggles with sin and a frightening guilt consciousness came to a conclusion in the rediscovery of the Gospel. This rediscovery of the Gospel has been summarized in the threefold *sola* of the Reformation: *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*." (Ibid.)

"In Luther's thinking the *sola Scriptura* is exclusively Christocentric. 'The Scripture alone' is the same as 'the Gospel alone,' and 'Gospel alone' is 'Christ alone.' . . . The important point for Luther was that in Christ God's gracious promises are an eternally abiding 'Yea' and 'Amen.'" (Pages 126 ff.; 2d ed., pp. 128 ff.)

"Lutheran dogmaticians usually speak of the Gospel as the power of God to bring us Christ and His treasures (*vis dativa*), and also the power to create faith, which makes these treasures our own (*vis effectiva*)." (p. 165; 2d ed., p. 167)

Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*: "The Gospel in the proper sense (*evangelium proprie acceptum*) is the Word of God in which God makes no moral demands whatever on man, hence reprove no transgressions, but on the contrary promises His grace for the sake of Christ by vicarious satisfaction to such as have not kept the Law." (III, 222)

"The term 'Gospel' is used in its proper sense in Holy Writ when it refers to what does not call for works but for faith (Rom. 1, 16-17), hence does not condemn sinners, but assures them of grace (Acts 20, 24), peace (Rom. 10, 15; Eph. 6, 15), and salvation (Eph. 1, 13)." (Ibid.)

In Holy Scripture and in the literature of the church the term *Gospel* frequently denotes the whole counsel of God for man and his salvation. As such it embraces also the Law and what it requires morally of man. In today's Protestant literature it is quite frequently used in a wider sense. Indeed at times it is made to express much that has its source subjectively in the theologian, e. g., "social

gospel." Where the distinction between Law and Gospel becomes an interesting but useless Reformation relic, there *Gospel* even in its wider connotation receives emphases that are "not of God" or His Word.

The term *Gospel* as it appears in the question before us is employed in its proper sense, in which it stands in contradistinction to the Law and its elements. The terms "grace, forgiveness of sins, Cross of Christ, Christ Crucified" are typical Gospel concepts. Yet these, too, are occasionally used in a wider sense.

Observe this use of "grace." When Moses, penitent for his anger and rash behavior, returns to the Lord with two new tables of stone, the divine ultimate behind the second giving of the Law is set forth as *grace*: "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation." (Ex. 34:6, 7)

Proclamation of the divine name, the self-revelation of God and His will, even in Law and judgment, has *grace* as its ultimate purpose. In this name God is *all grace*. The Law is to minister to His covenant and promise of mercy made generations earlier with Israel's patriarchs. In the Old Testament, too, "God is Love!"

The term "forgiveness of sins" *per se* is pure Gospel. In the works of Luther and Lutheran dogmaticians, however, it frequently expresses the Gospel concept in a wider sense. Often synonymous with *the Gospel, the Word of God, justification by faith*, it becomes the cardinal principle in the whole of Christian doctrine, faith, and life, and at times it expresses the whole counsel of God.

The expression *Cross of Christ* is taken to refer to the instrument on which the Savior died, not the persecution endured for His name's sake. *Christ Crucified* is taken to express His historical crucifixion. These are clearly Gospel concepts and almost exclusively so used. Yet occasionally these express the Law and wrath of God against the sinner and his sin.

Dr. F. Pieper points to the words of Jesus: "Daughters of Jeru-

salem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. . . . For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:27 ff., RSV), and remarks: "Of course the wrath of God over the sin of men can and should be taught also from the suffering and death of Christ. Christ Himself makes this use of His suffering and death. But in so far as it is thus used, not Gospel but Law is being preached, both terms taken in their proper sense" (III, 235). In this connection Pieper quotes Luther: "Yea, what more forcible, more terrible declaration and preaching of God's wrath against sin is there than just the suffering and death of Christ, His Son? But as long as all this preaches God's wrath and terrifies men, it is not yet the preaching of the Gospel nor Christ's own preaching, but that of Moses and the Law against the impenitent."

In the question before us, however, these terms are limited to express *the Gospel* in its *proper sense*, since they stand in contradiction to *the Law and its elements*.

Dictionary Definitions of Law and Its Elements

The term *Law* is derived from verb *to lie*, and means that which is laid down. It has fifteen connotations in Webster's New World Dictionary. In one way or another all express the basic meaning of "rules of conduct established and enforced by authority." The following is given for ecclesiastical usage: "(a) a divine commandment. (b) all divine commandments collectively."

Lexico-Exegetical

The term *Law* is used in Holy Scripture and theological literature both in a wider and in a proper sense. It refers especially to the Mosaic Law. Since Law and its observance are central in Jewish piety, the Law almost comes to mean religion. At times it is all-inclusive of God's self-revelation to His people. In the wider sense the term stands for Holy Scripture generally, on the principle that the most prominent part gives its name to the whole. Often in Holy Scripture the term expresses an antithesis to the *Gospel*. As such it is divine authority "telling man how he is to be and what he is to do and not to do," threatening wrath and

punishment to the disobedient and promising favor and blessing to those who keep it. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich s. v. νόμος)

Ecclesiastical

Formula of Concord: "The Law is properly a divine doctrine in which the righteous, immutable will of God is revealed, what is to be the quality of man in his nature, thoughts, words and works, in order that he may be pleasing and acceptable to God; and it threatens its transgressors with God's wrath and temporal and eternal punishments." (Solid Declaration, V, 17)

Again: "We believe, teach, and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine which teaches what is right and pleasing to God and reproves everything that is contrary to God's will." (Epitome, V, 3)

Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics:* "The Law in the proper sense (*lex proprie accepta*) is the Word of God in which God demands of men that in their nature and in their thoughts, words, and acts they conform to the standard of His commandments and pronounces the curse on those who fail to comply." (III, 222)

Again: "the term 'Law' is used in its proper, i. e., primary, sense in Scripture when it refers to what does not bear on faith, but demands perfect observance on the part of man (Gal. 3, 12), pronounces the curse on all transgressors (Gal. 3, 10), stops the mouth of all the world (Rom. 3, 19), and therefore transmits the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3, 20)." (Ibid.)

The term "elements of the Law" in the question before us is limited to Law or any of its connotations and its uses in the proper sense.

Question Restated and Clarified

When we are speaking of the Gospel (grace, forgiveness of sin, Cross of Christ, Christ Crucified), is it permissible for us to mix elements of the Law into this concept? In the paragraphs to follow the term *Gospel* is understood in its proper sense, that is, as the glad tidings in which God graciously offers to sinful men forgiveness, life, and salvation through faith in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. The terms *grace, forgiveness of sins, Cross of Christ, Christ Crucified*, are also so understood. *Elements of the Law* are accepted as connotations or uses of the Law in its proper sense.

II

ANSWER: TO MIX ELEMENTS OF THE LAW WITH THE GOSPEL
IN ITS PROPER SENSE IS NOT PERMISSIBLE

In the Means of Grace

It is not permissible in the doctrine of the *Means of Grace*. Only the Gospel, the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, offers to contrite sinners forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Whether Word or Sacrament, it is the Gospel alone that offers, promises, and conveys to a sinner whose conscience is burdened with sin and wrath what he most needs — forgiveness of sins and salvation. In the historic event of Jesus Christ, His person and work, His holy life and sacrifice, all lost mankind has become righteous in the presence of God. In the glory of His resurrection and exaltation God, who “was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,” affirms and continues to proclaim: “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him!” Only in this event is there expiation for the world’s sin. And its Gospel is the only “Word of reconciliation” inviting sinners, “Be ye reconciled to God!” To say it with Luther, “It is such a preaching as shows and gives nothing else than grace and forgiveness in Christ.” (W. A., XXII, 87, quoted in Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 12)

The Law forbids and demands and threatens with punishment. It is entirely without power to offer or convey life, the will and strength to obey. Since it consistently makes demands of man, the conclusion is erroneously drawn that it enables him to do right and so serves him in becoming pious. It is asserted that the Law at least fits him morally to receive Christ and forgiving grace. This very thought is rejected when Paul says: “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law” (Gal. 2:21). The Law is without power to offer grace or help or life to a sinner. Nor does Scripture ever use the Law for this purpose.

Yet the means of grace, Gospel and Sacrament, with God’s offer of forgiveness, life, and salvation to the sinner, remain ineffective without proper ministration of the Law. Knowledge of sin must be taught from the Law (Rom. 3:20). When the Law forbids and commands what is to be done or left undone, it convicts the sinner

of transgression, charges him with guilt, and terrifies him with the wrath of God. It is the power and efficacy of the Law to point out sin and the deep corruption of human nature and thereby throw man into despair and terror. Its chief office and purpose is to effect contrition. In this respect only does it ready the sinner to receive the Gospel's offer of grace.

While Law and Gospel are both the Word of God, their effects upon the sinner are as different from each other as hell differs from heaven. George Stoeckhardt well says:

Nothing is farther from the truth than to present the Law as an introduction to the Gospel, the effect of the Law as the beginning of a reform which is perfected in faith. The Law indeed is called and truly is "our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24). But this does not mean to say that the Law brings the heart of man into a certain moral disposition in which it is receptive for faith and salvation in Christ. On the contrary, the apostle points out the purpose and pedagogy of God, who first of all concludes everything under sin (Gal. 3:22), so that in an entirely different way, a way directly opposed to the Law, namely, by promise of faith, He may lead to salvation. (*Lehre und Wehre*, XXXIII [June 1887], 159 ff.)

The Law "was added [430 years after the promise of grace] because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19). "The Scripture consigned all things to sin that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Gal. 3:22, RSV). Luther comments on Luke 1:55: "The subsequent giving of the Law to the Jews was not on a par with this promise [Abraham's Seed]. The Law was given in order that by its light they might the better come to know their cursed state and the more fervently and heartily desire the promised Seed; in this they had an advantage over all the heathen world. But they turned this advantage into a disadvantage; they undertook to keep the Law by their own strength, and failed to learn from it their needy and cursed state." (*Luther's Works*, American edition, Vol. 21, p. 354)

In this sense only does the Law lead to Christ: it effects a knowledge of sin and God's wrath. Yet, as it does so, it is God's ultimate plan, having filled a sinner with fear and terror through His Law, to comfort him with His promise of grace and forgiveness and to

give him life and salvation. In the ministration of both Law and Gospel God has but one end in view: the salvation of mankind.

In Conversion

Since the Law is without power to offer a sinner any spiritual help whatsoever, elements or uses thereof must not be mingled with the Gospel as *means of grace*. Nor is this mingling permissible in the doctrine of *conversion*.

Where our Lutheran Confessions deal with conversion, they distinguish clearly between what God effects through the Law and what He offers through the Gospel.

Apology: "Paul almost everywhere, when he describes conversion or renewal, designates these two parts . . . that we are dead to sin, which takes place by contrition and its terrors; and that we should rise again with Christ, which takes place when by faith we again obtain consolation and life" (XII, 46). Again: "In repentance these two things ought always to exist, namely, *contrition and faith*." (XII, 57)

Smalcald Articles:

This, then, is the thunderbolt of God by which He strikes in a heap both manifest sinners and false saints, and suffers no one to be in the right, but drives them altogether to terror and despair. This is the hammer as Jeremiah says 23:29: "Is not My Word like a hammer that breaketh a rock in pieces?" This is not *activa contritio*, or manufactured repentance, but *passiva contritio*, true sorrow of heart, suffering and sensation of death.

This, then, is what it means to begin true repentance; and here man must hear such a sentence as this: You are all of no account, whether you be manifest sinners or saints; you all must become different and do otherwise than you now are and are doing, whether you are as great, wise, powerful, and holy as you may. Here no one is godly.

But to this office the New Testament immediately adds the consolatory promise of grace through the Gospel, which must be believed, as Christ declares, Mark 1:15: "Repent and believe the Gospel," i. e., become different and do otherwise and believe My promise. And John, preceding Him, is called a preacher of repentance, however, for the remission of sins; i. e., John was to accuse all and convict them of being sinners, that they might know what

they were before God, and might acknowledge that they were lost men, and might thus be prepared for the Lord to receive grace and to expect and accept from Him the remission of sins. Thus also Christ Himself says (Luke 24:47): "Repentance and remission of sins must be preached in My name among all nations." (Part Three, III, 2—6)

Conversion then is this, that God first of all works in the heart a knowledge of sin, fear and terror of God's wrath and judgment, i. e., works contrition or repentance in the narrow sense. Then He kindles saving faith in that heart through the Gospel of Christ.

The Gospel alone speaks to us of Christ, the only Redeemer; of that righteousness which Christ has merited, forgiveness of sins, and of the life to come. Through this preaching the heart of the contrite sinner is cheered and comforted and a spark of faith is kindled in it. Only when faith has been kindled and glows in the heart is a sinner truly converted and renewed. His understanding and will is renewed. It is this preaching alone which quickens and bestows the Spirit, arouses spiritual, godly life in the heart. The Gospel, and not the Law or any element thereof, is the "seed of regeneration." The Gospel, and not the Law or any element thereof, is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." (1 Peter 1:23; Rom. 1:16)

In Faith and Justification

It is, furthermore, not permissible to mix the Gospel with elements of Law in the doctrine of *faith* and *justification*. The Gospel alone quickens and converts the sinner to God. It alone also justifies the converted, or regenerated, and keeps them in the faith. Whatever Scripture says of the Law and Gospel in their respective offices remains in force also after conversion. The preaching of both remains significant for the regenerate, too, as long as they live upon this earth.

What takes place at the time of conversion repeats itself daily in the heart and life of a Christian. His new spiritual being experiences a constant and continuing repentance. To confess his sins to God in true contrition and in faith to take hold of Jesus Christ, his only Redeemer, is his daily calling. To continue in the one as in the other he is in constant need of both Law and Gospel.

In conversion, or regeneration, man is not completely renewed. Converted Christians still have sin. With Paul they acknowledge and confess: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). As long as a Christian is upon this earth, he is never completely and entirely rid of his original sinful nature, the corrupt flesh. And this sinful nature in him is not one whit better than the corrupt flesh of the world. It, too, is in need of the rod of the Law. "By the Law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20) is an ever reoccurring road sign on the Christian's way. And the more closely he observes this sign from day to day, placing heart and behavior under its direction, the more he experiences the great abyss between God and all ungodliness that still adheres to him. The deeper he peers into the abyss of his natural heart, the more he discovers his alienation from God.

Hence a Christian, too, becomes more and more conscious of his sins, experiences and feels the terrors of the Law. At times a single sin exposed by God's Word and Law can torture and torment him mercilessly. Even on the way to Life children of God are not spared this experience.

Yet, in all this, trust in the promise of the Gospel and faith in God's forgiving grace in Christ remains the fundamental and real characteristic of the Christian. His sin, the Law, and God's wrath do not hurl him into his hopeless preconversion state. Knowing Christ in faith, he at once rushes from sin, wrath, and damnation to his Savior and Redeemer, seeks and finds in Him comfort and forgiveness. He carries Christ in his heart, and when God's curse and wrath cut into his conscience, he reminds himself of forgiveness in Christ, the expiation of his guilt, and the removal of its curse. In Gospel-wrought faith he takes his sin that has been exposed by the Law and prayerfully places it before God and sighs in the power of God's Holy Spirit concerning the evil and corrupt nature that still clings to him like mud: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But the sigh rises to a paean of thanksgiving for his redemption: "I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!"

This function of Law and Gospel in a Christian's life is briefly set forth in the Formula of Concord: "Therefore, as often as believers stumble, they are reprov'd by the Holy Spirit from the Law,

and by the same Spirit are raised up and comforted again by the preaching of the Holy Gospel." (Solid Declaration, VI, 14)

Yet it is only the Gospel that nurtures and preserves such faith. "Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:5). "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man [risen Christ] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses." (Acts 13:39. See also Rom. 5:1; 3:28; Gal. 3:24)

Since justification is "by faith, without the works of the Law," elements of the Law may not be mingled with the Gospel in the doctrine of justification and faith. "It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:7 f.)

In Sanctification

It is not permissible to mix elements of the Law with the Gospel in the doctrine of *sanctification* and *good works*. The sanctification of a believer's heart and life, mind and spirit, attitudes and behavior, is entirely and alone the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

"Sanctification" Defined

The Bible speaks frequently and with decisive emphasis about sanctification. The truth it sets forth belongs to the "milk of the Word" and must be taught to all Christians, also to little children. It is particularly in this doctrine that Law and Gospel are frequently mixed to the confusion and discomfort of many—to the despair of some!

The Bible and our Lutheran Confessions use the term *sanctification* with wider and with more limited connotations. All that God's Word and Spirit produces in the heart and life of a believer, his call, conversion, regeneration, illumination, justification, his new life in faith terminating in the spiritual perfection of eternal life—all this is at times expressed as sanctification. The Gospel is preached that men might receive "inheritance among them which are *sanctified*" (Acts 26:8). The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the *sanctified* who are "perfected forever" (Heb. 10:14. See also 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). In the Lutheran Confessions the term

occurs frequently in this wider sense. Quenstedt remarks on Eph. 5:25: "*Sanctification* is at times taken in the wider sense and includes justification." (Quoted by Pieper, III, 4)

The term *sanctification* is used by Lutherans also in its narrower sense to denote the spiritual growth which follows justification. It expresses the work of God in the heart and life of one who already is a Christian, whom God is leading step by step in a renewal of the divine image within him; step by step in righteousness of living, in thought, word, and deed; in holiness of conduct and behavior; in emotions, wishes, prayers, devotions, and in charity toward all men.

As soon as an individual repents and lays hold of God's forgiveness through faith in the redemption wrought by Christ Jesus, he is justified. This justification is instantaneous and perfect. It is never a gradual process. Clothed in Christ's righteousness, he is God's *saint*. Corrupt flesh and sinful nature still cling to him, however, and "nothing good dwells in" this flesh. Hence a Christian finds himself in a daily struggle against sin. It is here that God through Word and Sacrament continues to "pound away at, buffet, immerse, and drown the old Adam and the sinful nature." By God's grace the Christian is activated in this work, and through the Holy Spirit's reign within, faith is increased, love toward God and man is strengthened, confidence in God and His promises is confirmed and established, the image of God is renewed. God's saint by faith becomes more and more righteous, more and more holy, more and more blessed, more and more firm in faith and godliness (Phil. 1:9-11). This is sanctification in the narrow sense.

The doctrine of sanctification in its narrow sense may be defined and briefly expressed as follows:

1. It refers to the operation of God's Holy Spirit in the heart of a Christian whereby he daily more and more puts off the old Adam and puts on the new man.
2. It expresses that work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and life of a believer through which he receives power to conquer the temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh; to conquer more and more the sins which so readily beset him — jealousy, discontentment, ingratitude, malice, lack of love for God and His Word and for his neighbor.

3. It includes also the Holy Spirit's work whereby he produces in the Christian fruits of the Spirit: meekness, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, and tenderness, so that the Christian grows more and more in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Solely the Work of God

This sanctification is solely and alone the work of God's Holy Spirit, a work of His grace and mercy.

"It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Man in his sinful nature is unwilling to be obedient, God-fearing, holy and righteous. God must make the unwilling willing. He must give strength and power to conquer sin. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22 ff.). All are virtues created in a believer through faith in the precious Gospel, or effected through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the Gift of the risen Savior to his believers, *teaches* them (John 14:26); *guides them into all truth* (John 16:13); *fills them with His gifts* (1 Cor. 12:7-11); as the "Spirit of adoption" strengthens their conviction that they are children of God (Rom. 8:16); sighs in their hearts of need, "Abba Father" (Rom. 8:15, 26). For the believers He is the Spirit "of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). He strengthens them in the daily battle against their flesh (Gal. 5:16-18, 22) and works in them "righteousness and peace and joy" (Rom. 14:17). They are enabled "to abound in hope" through His power (Rom. 15:13).

This sanctification is the fruit of justifying faith. It occurs only in the heart and life of a true believer in Christ. Jesus teaches: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). And Paul affirms: "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:8 f.)

Luther, too, so teaches: "Faith is a divine work in us which transforms us, gives us a new birth, slays the old Adam, makes us altogether different men in heart, affection, and mind and brings with

it the Holy Spirit. Oh, it is a living, energetic, active, mighty thing, this faith! It cannot but do good unceasingly. There is no question asked whether good works ought to be done, but before the question is asked, the works have been done, and there is a continuous doing of them." (W. A. Bibel, VII, 11. SL XIV, 88)

"Our sin is not forgiven in order that we may continue to live in sin, but in order that we may cease from sinning. Otherwise it would not be forgiveness, but license to sin." (W. A. XXII, 132. SL XII, 786)

Following is one of many examples showing how our church has confessed this doctrine: "Holy Scripture teaches very clearly that the last final purpose of the redemptive work of Jesus is sanctification. Our forgiveness, our atonement, our justification, is not the final goal and purpose, but only the means by which sanctification is attained. God forgives our sins that we may leave them. Christ did not become our Redeemer simply in order that we might be rid of our guilt and punishment, but chiefly that we might be perfectly free from sin." (*Western District Proceedings*, 1875, p. 46)

Sanctification and good works in a spiritual sense are initiated and effected entirely and solely through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Listen to Paul: "Neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers . . . greedy, nor drunkards. . . . And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were *sanctified*, you were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Jesus' "name" is His Gospel. Hear Him exhort all "who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus": "All Scripture"—and remember this is the sacred writing which is "able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"—"all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16 f. RSV)

With Luther we confess: "The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." The means through which the Holy Ghost has done all this is the Gospel. True godliness and good

works in a spiritual sense are never effected by the Law or any of its elements or uses. "Let me ask you this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?" Paul asks incisively (Gal. 3:2). Anyone who thinks that true obedience to God's will, a life of sanctification and good works, is effected by the Law is mistaken. True faith, true love for God, for a neighbor, or for an enemy is produced by the Gospel. A life of love is the fruit of a Gospel-wrought faith. It is "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). "I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the *mercies of God*, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. . . . Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom. 12:1 f.)

It is the Gospel alone and not the Law that slays sin and its dominion in man. "But now we are discharged from the Law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (Rom. 7:6). This is true for all who "belong to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God" (Rom. 7:4). By the Law man is held in bondage and dominion of sin. Through faith in the Gospel of Christ, who has freed him from this bondage, "sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under Law but under grace." (Rom. 6:14)

Stoeckhardt says:

A Christian never does anything truly good "by constraint of the Law," but only by "constraint" of the Gospel. . . . Never are we brought to deny fleshly lusts—hatred, wrath, jealousy, unchastity, avarice, covetousness—by the rigid demands of the Law. . . . A Christian's hatred and heartfelt loathing of sin, his inward turning away from sin, is actuated and brought about solely by the love of God revealed in the Gospel. . . . Never are we enabled to love God and our neighbor by the "Thou shalt" of the Law, namely, "Thou shalt love the Lord, Thy God, with all thy heart," etc., "and thy neighbor as thyself." Love will not be constrained. A Christian's love to God from the heart, his joy and pleasure in God and things godly, his love to the brethren for God's sake, his endurance of all evil for God's sake, his overcoming in patience, are made possible only by the love of God which is revealed in Christ and proclaimed to us in the Gospel (op. cit., p. 245).

The Third Use of the Law

This being true that a believer's sanctification and life of godliness is altogether the work of God's Spirit in the Gospel, does a Christian then have any use for God's Law? Does the apostle say that a Christian has no use for it when he states: "The Law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient . . . according to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust"? (1 Tim. 1:9-11)

Controversy on this issue occupied the writers of the Formula of Concord and has continued to discomfort the church that confesses it. An intensive and consecrated research in this truth of revelation would today provide our own preaching and practical theology with a spiritually healthful and strengthening prophylaxis. Here, too, the Gospel alone, with its grace alone, Christ alone, faith alone, must remain pure and without the Law's alloy.

The Solid Declaration deals with the subject in the 26 paragraphs of Article VI under the heading "Of the Third Use of God's Law." The following paragraphs frequently quote from this passage.

Although free from the Law, from its coercion, bondage, and curse, and in this sense "no longer under Law but under grace," a Christian nevertheless has "his delight in the Law of the Lord and meditates therein" daily (Psalm 1). The Law was written in man's heart as he issued from the hand of his Maker. So the regenerate, too, is not lawless, without the Law, but "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." He cheerfully remains "in the Law" and according to the new man rejoices in it and the "works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

At this point the Formula of Concord sharply distinguishes between a Christian's carnal nature and the renewal of God's image in his "inner man." See Rom. 7:18 ff.; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 8:2.

If renewal of the divine image were complete in this life, Christians "would do of themselves, and altogether voluntarily, without any instruction, admonition, urging or driving of the Law, what they are in duty bound to do according to God's will . . . just as the angels render an entirely voluntary obedience." Since this is not so and soldiers in the Church Militant must be "able to stand against the wiles of the devil" and contend against principalities

and powers of darkness, the soldiers' flesh must be in subjection and discipline. Because of its desperate and deceitful lusts the Law must not only expose, admonish, and threaten but also punish. (Cf. Ps. 119:71; 1 Cor. 9:27)

This remains true even though it is only the Gospel that supplies him with an all-sufficient equipment for victory in the conflict. "Born anew by the Spirit of God" and "led by the Spirit of Christ," the Christian is altogether free from the Law and its mandates and does everything, "insofar as he is born anew," according to God's will, "from a free, cheerful spirit." Yet it is also true that his carnal ego yields to all this and is driven "against his will and under coercion, no less than the godless are driven and held in obedience by threats of the Law." (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 7:18, 19)

Must a Christian not frequently experience that a heavy foot of the flesh too often rests on the accelerator of life's chariot as it rushes through society's traffic lanes and caution lights — to be restrained more by the sight of uniform and a thought of penalty than by cheerful and willing obedience of faith? This is obedience to Law and its observance a work of the Law, withal a good work within the realm of mundane society, though not a fruit of faith.

In dealing with a Christian's need for the Law the confessors of the Formula of Concord also point to it as a safeguard against zeal without knowledge, in which the deceitful heart of Christians may "hit upon a holiness and devotion of their own and, under the pretext of the Spirit of God, set up a self-chosen worship without God's Word and command" (Deut. 12:8, 28, 32). Finally it has its use lest a Christian "easily imagine that his work and life are entirely pure and perfect."

Yet, in all this, elements of the Law must not be commingled with the Gospel. Through the Law God's Holy Spirit reproves and chastises the carnal self when believers stumble and yield to the flesh. "By the same Spirit they are raised up and comforted again with the preaching of the Gospel."

Conclusion

This is a special hour in time. In a world of deepening ideological conflict, entrusted with new and mysterious scientific knowledge and catastrophic forces, its rulers on the left determined to dethrone

the King of kings from His celestial mercy seat and "taking counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed," while on the right "the powers that be" and the Church Militant gradually become aware of encroaching crisis, another "fullness of time" is come for the Lord and His counsel of grace.

In historical crises, as in the era of the Reformation, so today, our Lord as Head "over all things to the church" is programming a kerygma of "the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matthew 24). "Now is the day of salvation!"

This is a time for the Gospel minister to be filled with joyous anticipation and a sense of holy trust. For every true preacher and teacher of Christ's Gospel let it be a day of cheerful consecration, of solemn responsibility, and of dauntless courage that rests only on Christ and His Gospel. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15)

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