

Foreword

This year marks the 475th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession and the 425th anniversary of the Book of Concord. The Augsburg Confession is the primary confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It was presented at the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530. The Book of Concord, which includes the Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Confessions, was prepared for official publication on the 50th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession in 1580. The Augsburg Confession clearly enunciates the chief article of the Christian faith, justification by faith alone: “It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.” ([AC IV] *Tappert*, p. 30) The purpose of our synod is to proclaim this gracious message of justification in Christ as taught in Scripture and summarized in our Lutheran Confessions. The essay *The Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord* gives the historical background to these Confessions.

The book of Hebrews points to the intimate connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The entire Old Testament ritual pictures or typifies the person and work of Jesus Christ. In his essay *Deliberate Sin Addressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews* the Rev. Aaron Hamilton gives an overview of the book of Hebrews and provides an in-depth study of Hebrews 10:26-31. The Rev. Hamilton is the pastor at Hope Lutheran Church, West Jordan, Utah.

Each of the books of the Bible has its particular structure and style. The structure of St. Mark’s Gospel has been studied and analyzed many times. Professor Michael Smith emphasizes a chiasmic approach to the Gospel in his essay *A Possible Two-fold Chiasmic Structure of the Gospel of Mark*. Professor Smith teaches at Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary.

In the early Middle Ages the Muslim world was rising to power. The followers of Mohammed took control of the Middle East and North Africa. Then they crossed into Spain hoping to conquer all of Western Europe. The power of Islam which appeared to be long forgotten has again resurged in our culture. Islam is a living force that our people are facing in their daily lives. There is a need for confessional Lutherans to understand the teaching of Islam and to be prepared to evangelize the Islamic world. The essay entitled *Understanding Islam and Witnessing to Muslims* speaks to these needs. This essay was written by the Rev. David Russow who has been called to an exploratory mission in Rogers, Minnesota.

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The Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord

Gaylin R. Schmeling

A. Lutheranism and the Augsburg Confession

The year 1521 was momentous. The Conquistador Hernando Cortez was subduing the Aztec Empire of Mexico and making it part of the Spanish domain. He was followed by Spanish missionaries who brought the Indians into the arms of the mother church. The countries of Europe were beginning an age of expansion that would bring the entire world under Western domination. Yet in the spiritual realm a far greater event was occurring at Worms south of Frankfurt in Germany. On April 18, 1521, an Augustinian monk stood before the church leaders and the Habsburg Charles V who was ruler of much of Western Europe and the Americas. When he was asked to take back or recant everything that he had written, the monk boldly responded with his “Here I stand” confession, which changed the course of Western civilization far more than the discovery of the Americas.

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen.¹

Martin Luther the Instrument of God

Martin Luther was born in the town of Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483, nine years before Columbus discovered America. The next day, the Feast of Martin of Tours, he was baptized. His parents, Hans and Margarethe, were devout German peasants. It

soon became apparent that young Martin had exceptional gifts. After his elementary training, he entered the University of Erfurt, Germany, where he excelled in studies of classical literature and philosophy planning for a career in law. But his plans ended abruptly. When he reached the age of 22, a thunderstorm and the death of a friend led Luther to make a vow to enter the quiet life of the monastery. Luther entered the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt in 1505. There he engaged in further studies and was ordained a priest in 1507. The religious lessons learned at home and in the church led Luther to believe that he had to do certain things in order to pacify an angry God and help in his own salvation. This dread of an angry God drove him in the monastery. He prayed, slaved, fasted, and studied until he wasted away to little more than skin and bones, and yet he felt no peace with God. The more he did the more he knew it would not be enough to make God love him.

After Luther accepted a call to Wittenberg as a professor of Sacred Scripture at the university, the whole question concerning how one is to be saved came to a head. As a reaction to the sale of indulgences, Luther placed the 95 theses on the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, which is considered by many the birthday of the Lutheran Church. As Luther taught and studied he became more and more uneasy with the Medieval Church's answer to the question of how one is saved. Probably in 1518 his Gospel breakthrough, sometimes described as the "tower experience,"²² occurred. As he studied Romans 1:16-17, 3:19-28 and other sections of Scripture, Luther came to understand that we are justified or declared righteous before God not by any good within us but alone on the basis of Christ's redemptive work which is ours by trusting in the Savior. We are not saved by anything we do or accomplish, as the Medieval Church taught, but by faith alone in the Savior. When Luther understood this central article of the faith, that we are justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law, he felt himself reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas the "justice of God" had previously filled him with fear, now it became to him inexpressibly sweet. This passage of Paul (Romans 1:16-17) became for him a gate to heaven.³ It was this central article of the faith that

Luther boldly defended at Worms. This is the clear teaching of Scripture and the whole Ancient Church.

After Worms and his subsequent seclusion in the Wartburg he continued the work of the Reformation. By 1522 his New Testament translation of the Bible was completed, and the translation of the Old Testament followed in 1534. Luther wanted the Word to be the daily nourishment for the people and therefore produced a translation readable for the common people. His *Small* and *Large Catechisms* were completed in 1529. One of Luther's most profound books, *On the Bondage of the Will*, had been written already in 1525 in reaction to the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536). Here Luther pointed out that sinful man had no free will in spiritual things. He was spiritually dead in transgression and sin.

Emperor Charles V had not been in his German lands since 1521 because of political difficulties elsewhere. Now he needed the support of all the German princes, including the Lutherans, to drive back the Turks who were at the gate of Vienna. In 1530 he called the Diet of Augsburg, hoping to bring unity between Lutherans and Catholics so that they would be ready to meet the Turks. Because Luther had been outlawed he could not attend the diet. He had to remain at Feste Coburg, where he was safe in the Saxon lands of Elector John the Constant. In his place was his young and brilliant co-worker, Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560). He was small of stature but great in knowledge. He probably helped Luther in the work of the Reformation more than any other individual. Yet after Luther's death he did irreparable damage to the Lutheran cause by his vacillation in doctrine. At Augsburg we see Melanchthon at his finest. Using several other Lutheran statements and with considerable input from Luther, he summarized the faith of Luther and his followers in a statement which has become known as the *Augsburg Confession*, the basic confession of the Lutheran Church. It was read at the diet at 3:00 p.m., Saturday, June 25, 1530. Shortly thereafter he wrote the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*.

Luther was also concerned about the worship life of God's people. His reform of the liturgy was conservative in nature. He disregarded only those things which were contrary to God's Word. He absolutely rejected the idea that the mass was a propitiatory sacrifice for the

sins of the living and the dead and he restored preaching to a central position in the service. The liturgy was first and foremost God's service to us in Word and Sacrament and secondarily our service of praise and thanksgiving to Him. Luther's first liturgical revision was the *Formula Missae*, his Latin mass, which is similar to Rite Two in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. Luther's second liturgical revision was the *Deutsche Messe*, the German mass. This is similar to Rite One in the *Hymnary*.

Luther continued to be very busy. He had the responsibility of father and husband. In 1525 he had married Katherine von Bora and their marriage was blessed with six children. Luther and Katie's family life was a wonderful example of the Christian home and parsonage. In 1537 Luther wrote the *Smalcald Articles* in preparation for a church council which did not occur, but the articles are counted among the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church. Luther continued to lead the Reformation. He taught classes at the university; he preached regularly; he produced hymns, articles, letters and books—so many that his writings fill more than fifty volumes in English. He died on February 18, 1546, at the age of 62, in Eisleben, where he had been born—one of the greatest teachers of the church.

The Growth of Lutheranism

Luther's Reformation was born in the province of Saxony and Luther himself rarely traveled outside the confines of the former East Germany. Yet the Word he proclaimed spread in every direction. Albert Hohenzollern, the grand master of the Teutonic Knights, received the Lutheran faith in 1522 and with him all of East Prussia. The German language was used in worship in Königsberg before it was introduced in Wittenberg. Visitation took place as early as 1525. In fact East Prussia was the first evangelical province of Germany. Hannover joined the Lutheran cause in 1533 and Schleswig in 1534. An important addition to Lutheranism came in 1534 when the province of Württemberg was won. Luther's great co-worker Johann Brenz helped organize the church in the southwestern German province.

Another of Luther's close associates, Johann Bugenhagen (1485-1558), organized Lutheranism in most of northern Germany. He was the pastor of the city church in Wittenberg and Luther's spiritual advisor. He translated the Bible into Low German (*Plattdeutsch*) the language of most northern Germans. In 1525 Bugenhagen was asked to come to Danzig and help reform the church there. From that time on he was considered the foremost organizer of the Lutheran Church. He established the church polity of the Lutheran Church in Hamburg, Lübeck, Braunschweig, Lower Saxony, and Pomerania. When Christian III desired to reform the churches of Denmark and Norway, he too called on Bugenhagen. Bugenhagen was absent from Wittenberg for nearly two years, during which time he reorganized the University of Copenhagen, crowned Christian III in the first Lutheran coronation, consecrated the bishops of Denmark and Norway, and established a new church order for the Scandinavian churches. This is the reason that the Norwegian-Danish Order of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is often called the "Bugenhagen Order."

Lutheranism in Scandinavia and the Baltic States

In 1536 Christian III called a diet in Copenhagen which formally adopted the Evangelical Lutheran faith as the official religion of Denmark. The spiritual leader of the Danish Reformation was Hans Tausen (1494-1561). He was preaching the Lutheran doctrine in Viborg by 1525. In 1530 under the leadership of Tausen the Lutherans presented a statement of their faith at the Diet of Copenhagen in 43 articles known as the Copenhagen Confession, which coincided in time with the Augsburg Confession. This work of Tausen prepared the way for Bugenhagen.

Lutheranism came to Norway through Denmark, with which it had been united since the Union of Kalmar in 1397. King Christian III, who was won for the Reformation while attending the Diet of Worms, established the Reformation officially at the Diet of Copenhagen in 1536. The full effects of the Reformation reached Norway the following year. Catholic bishops were deposed and Lutheran bishops gradually took their place. The first Lutheran bishop appointed to

Norway was Geble Pedersson, who was ordained by Bugenhagen. Still the laity did not really understand the Reformation. The pastors were poorly trained and both they and the laity suffered under the handicap of having only the Danish Bible, hymnbook, and liturgy. Norwegian translations were slow in coming. It was not until the reign of Christian IV (1577-1648) that the Lutheran church became the church of all parts of Norway. At this time Lutheranism took root in Norway through the work of Jørgen Eriksen, Bishop of Stavanger. Known as "Norway's Luther," he had great influence on the spiritual life of clergy and laity. He published excellent sermons, in particular a series of sermons on the book of Jonah which were used in the instruction of pastors. By the end of the century the Reformation was established and organized in Norway. Through Iceland's close connection with Norway Lutheranism reached also that land.

Olavus and Laurentius Petri were the church reformers in Sweden. Olavus (1493-1522) did more than any other teacher to establish Lutheran theology in Sweden. In his doctrinal, liturgical, polemical, and homiletical writings he gave Sweden a statement of faith which established the Swedish church as Lutheran for centuries. His brother Laurentius (1499-1573) preserved the episcopal form of church government and an order of worship which saved the best elements of the past for the new liturgy. The accomplishments of the Petri brothers were evident in the ability of the evangelical church in Sweden to defend itself against the Romanizing tendencies of John III and against the Counter Reformation during the reign of Sigismund, so that at Uppsala in 1593 the church declared itself Lutheran. From Sweden Lutheranism came to Finland, much of which was controlled by Sweden.

Lutheranism came to the Baltic States first in Riga, Latvia. The city clerk Briesmann was an early reformer here. The Briesmann liturgy was translated into Lettish for the use of the pastors. The Livonia to which Luther wrote included Reval, the capital of Estonia, and Dorpat (Tartu). There was evangelical preaching in Reval very early, and in 1524 the city council named John Lange as evangelical pastor. The Reformation began among the German-speaking people and then reached the native populations. The Baltic Sea was gradually becoming a Lutheran lake.

B. Lutheranism and the Book of Concord

After Luther's death Charles V had sufficient forces to declare war on the Lutheran princes. Because there was dissension in their ranks Charles was able to defeat the Lutherans at the Battle of Mühlberg on April 24, 1547. After the battle Charles entered Wittenberg, where it is said that he was asked if he desired the bones of Luther to be exhumed and burned. He is said to have replied, "I make war with the living, not the dead." Now in control of much of Germany he imposed the Augsburg Interim on the Lutherans. The Interim conceded the communion cup and the marriage of priests to the Lutherans, but most of the church ceremonies and dogmas remained Roman. With the Leipzig Interim Melanchthon attempted a compromise which caused him to lose the respect of many Lutherans. Harsh treatment of Protestant prisoners finally provoked the Lutherans to throw off the Spanish yoke. When he was defeated in Saxony, Charles was forced to grant Protestantism tentative recognition through the Peace of Passau in 1552 and legal recognition via the Peace of Augsburg in 1555.

Controversies Among the Lutherans

When Luther died there was a leadership vacuum among his followers. Luther's mantle logically fell to Melanchthon but he vacillated in times of crises and did not have leadership abilities. As a result, conflicting parties arose among Lutherans. The two main groups were the Gnesio-Lutherans, or Genuine Lutherans, who believed they were giving an authentic presentation of Luther's teachings, and the Philippists who believed that Philip Melanchthon's insights were important in Lutheranism. By the grace of God a number of great churchmen arose, including Martin Chemnitz, Nikolaus Selnecker, Jakob Andreae, and David Chytraeus, who through their writings and teachings brought peace to the Lutheran church. The controversies of the time were settled in a joint writing by these men in 1577 known as the *Formula of Concord*. These men were generally from the Gnesio-Lutheran camp but they saw the extremes of both sides and avoided them as true concordists.

We generally speak of six controversies which precipitated the *Formula of Concord*. **The Adiaphoristic (*adiaphoron*: a matter of indifference) Controversy** was caused by the attitude of Melanchthon and the Philippists toward ceremonies in the Leipzig Interim. Melanchthon allowed many of the Roman ceremonies for the sake of compromise under the pretext that these rites were neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture, and thus were *adiaphora* or matters of indifference. Flacius and other Gnesio-Lutherans held that the use of the Roman vestments and ceremonies was not an *adiaphoron* but implied a compromise in doctrine. Melanchthon also compromised with Rome on the doctrine of justification and the seven Sacraments. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 removed the cause for this controversy, but no agreement on the principles was reached. The *Formula* upheld the stand of Matthias Flacius (1520-1575) the leader of the Gnesio-Lutherans: “Nothing is an *adiaphoron* when confession and offense are involved.”

The Majoristic Controversy began when George Major, a disciple of Melanchthon, stated that good works were necessary to salvation. Forgiveness of sins was obtained by faith alone, but no one would be saved without good works. The Gnesio-Lutherans were totally opposed to this teaching because it was a return to the Roman doctrine of salvation by faith and good works. Old Nicholas Amsdorf, a faithful co-worker of Luther, went to the other extreme saying that good works were injurious to salvation. What he meant was that reliance on good works for salvation was injurious. Here the concordists rejected both extremes. In Article 4 of the *Formula* they stated that good works are not necessary for salvation; neither are they injurious to salvation. However, good works are necessary in our life because faith will always show itself in a Christ-like life.

The Flacian and the Synergistic (*syn*: together + *ergon*: work) Controversies centered in whether or not the human will or effort cooperated in conversion and salvation. Gnesio-Lutherans contended that man is totally dead in sins and hostile to God. Man could contribute nothing whatever toward his conversion. Melanchthon and his followers maintained that the human will was a co-agent with the Word and the Spirit of God in man’s conversion and salvation. Sinful nature had the freedom either to resist or to

accept the grace of God. Thus man was responsible either for his own salvation or damnation. Flacius over-reacted to Melancthon's synergism by saying that original sin is of the very substance of fallen man. This made evil part of the essence of man. The *Formula* rejected any cooperation on the part of man in conversion and salvation. It also explained that original sin is a true corruption of the human nature but is not part of the substance of fallen man as Flacius maintained.

The Osiandrian Controversy centered around the doctrine of justification taught by Andreas Osiander of Nürnberg. Reacting against what he regarded as overemphasis on forensic justification, he taught that God does not declare the sinner just, but makes him just. God does not impute Christ's obedience and righteousness to the sinner, but Christ's divine nature dwells within him making him righteous. In many ways Osiander was reverting to a Roman view of justification. The authors of the *Formula* categorically confessed the biblical doctrine of forensic justification, that we are declared righteous on the basis of obedience and righteousness gained for us by another, namely, Christ. Christ is our righteousness, not according to the divine nature alone nor according to the human nature alone, but according to both natures. The whole Christ accomplished the perfect obedience and righteousness which is counted as ours by faith in the Savior.

The Antinomian (*anti*: against + *nomos*: law) Controversy concerned the place of the Law in the plan of salvation. Luther had maintained that both the Law and the Gospel should be preached because "through the law comes the knowledge of sin." It is not possible to preach forgiveness effectively where the knowledge of sin is absent. John Agricola and others held that the Decalogue belonged to the hall of justice, and not in the pulpit. Only the Gospel should be preached because this alone was capable of producing a real change of heart and life. There were also some who spoke against the third use of the Law. The concordists maintained that this was a proper use of the Law in the church. The Law has a proper three-fold use (curb, mirror, guide).

Crypto-Calvinistic Controversy concerned the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The Philippists were moving toward views similar

to that of Calvin. Melancthon in the *Variata* (altered) form of the *Augsburg Confession* had so watered down the statement on the Supper that Calvin was able to sign it. This controversy carried over into the doctrine of Christology. The Calvinists believed that after the ascension Christ's body is in one location in heaven and therefore He is with us only as God and not as man. He is not with us as our loving brother who knows our weaknesses but only in the blazing divinity before which none may dare to stand. Following this kind of logic the Calvinists readily rejected Christ's bodily presence in the Supper. The Formula upheld the clear teaching of Scripture that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the Supper under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. Also Christ is with us at all times and places not only in the fiery deity but also as true man our brother, for we want to know no God except God in the flesh.

The Book of Concord

While Selnecker, Chemnitz, Andreae, Chytraeus, Koerner, and Musculus were instrumental in writing the *Formula*, the uncontested leader among them was Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586). In fact he was the leading light in Lutheranism after Luther—so much so that there was the saying, “If the second Martin (Chemnitz) had not come, the first Martin (Luther) would scarcely have stood.” (*Si Martinus non fuisset, Martinus vix stetisset.*) In his early years he attained the position of librarian at the ducal library of Königsberg. His study there prepared him for his future as one of the greatest theologians of the age. In 1554 he was ordained into the public ministry in Braunschweig, and in 1567 he was appointed superintendent of Braunschweig. He continued in this position until the final two years of his life. His three major writings are the *Examen*, a critique of the Council of Trent; *De Duabus Naturis*, a study of the two natures in Christ; and his *Loci Theologici*.

The *Formula of Concord* written in 1577 together with the three *Ecumenical Creeds*, the *Augsburg Confession* (1530), the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531), the *Smalcald Articles* (1537), the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (1537), the

Small Catechism (1529), and the *Large Catechism* (1529) forms the *Book of Concord*. On June 25, 1580, exactly fifty years after the *Augsburg Confession* had been presented to Emperor Charles V, the *Book of Concord* was published in Dresden, Germany. This year of 2005 marks the 475th anniversary of the *Augsburg Confession* and the 425th anniversary of the *Book of Concord*. The documents in this book are the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. They present a clear exposition of the teaching of Sacred Scripture. The Lutheran Church accepts the Confessions contained in the *Book of Concord* of 1580, not insofar as, but because they are a correct exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God. What a treasure the Lutheran church has in these confessional writings.

End Notes

¹Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), p. 195.

²LW 54:193

³LW 34:337

Deliberate Sin Addressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews

Aaron Hamilton

Introduction

1. Being unable to review the entire content of the Epistle to the Hebrews leading up to the verses we are considering, it seems fitting to lay a more general foundation for this paper from the viewpoint of Old Testament Scripture. Besides being a benefit to this discussion, the richness of the Old Covenant is blessing for our souls, given to us so that we don't lose heart, fall from faith, and forfeit the good inheritance God intends for us. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Romans 15.4, KJV.

2. If we first come to faith in adulthood, one might argue that our instruction best begins with a presentation of the Fall of man, and the Promise of salvation.¹ This approach introduces the doctrine of original sin at the beginning, and reveals the true reason for the darkness and suffering we see in the world around us. The early chapters of Genesis reveal fallen human nature in such a way that it can easily be recognized in daily life. Thereafter, the first promise of the Christ (Genesis 3.15) can lead up to a simple conclusion: Even though it was written over a long period of time, by many different authors, the Bible is really one divinely inspired story, and Jesus is the hero.

3. The same thought continues throughout instruction, and throughout the personal study and devotional life of the Christian. Specific to the Law and the Prophets, Christ is revealed in three ways. To begin with, God gave *Promises*, announcing *Christ* ahead of time: Who He is—that He Is both true God and true Man (Genesis 3.15, Isaiah 9.6); what His work would be—that He would suffer terrible punishment and die for us (Isaiah 53, Psalm 22); yet, He would defeat death (Psalm 16.10). In these promises there is also

great detail, e.g., regarding the Lord's humble birth in Bethlehem, to a Virgin mother from the family of David; regarding His appearance on Palm Sunday; His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver; and that they would both divide up and cast lots for His clothing, etc.

4. In later Holy Scripture, St. Paul teaches the selfsame doctrine of Moses and the Prophets: Abraham believed God's promises in the coming Savior, and his faith was credited to him as righteousness; and again, the righteous shall live by faith. In this there's already profound continuity. But there's more. There is great Christological meaning to be found in ancient Israelite history, and Jewish worship life.

5. Christ is *typified* in history throughout the Law and the Prophets. Some types of Christ are expressly explained in later Scripture. Some are not. To people living and dying in bitter bondage in Egypt, the Lord God sent His servant Moses. So that there could be no doubt that God sent him, he came with signs: the staff that turned into a snake, and back again; a hand becoming leprous, and then being restored; the Nile river water that turned to blood. At first, these signs would seem to be merely strange. Upon reflection, they perfectly pictured the hope of the ages in Christ: *victory over the devil, purification from sin, and deliverance from death.*²

6. The Passover Lamb is a type of Christ. Deliverance by Holy Baptism into His death is typified as the aptly-named *Red Sea*. Manna appearing on the ground is a type of Christ, Who is Bread from heaven, bringing life to those who otherwise would have died (John 6). Water from the rock, the Bronze Serpent lifted up in the wilderness, Samson, who saved his people from their enemies in his death, Jonah in the belly of the giant fish, and Daniel lifted from the Lion's den alive—all these find their greater Anti-type in the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

7. Johann Gerhard³ preached on the Passion of Christ from the test of Abraham's faith. Isaac, the only-begotten son, himself carried the wood for the sacrifice. The ram caught in the thicket was provided as

a substitute, and Isaac—figuratively speaking—was received back from the dead. Christ is not just pictured in one of the characters in this account. He is in the story throughout, in all of its details. You can't turn around without seeing Him. As for whether or not Abraham saw and recognized Him, Jesus said to the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

8. Many years later, at the same location, David witnessed the angel bringing destruction on Jerusalem for his own sin in conducting a census of the fighting men of Israel. This story has the timely application that sins can have far reaching consequences, and that a nation suffers because of the sins of its leadership. We must put our trust in God, rather than in the strength of men. Finally and most compellingly, God's heart is revealed. His true delight is in showing mercy. He can no longer bear the trouble coming on His people. But on still another level, David himself becomes a symbol for the first Adam—who through one trespass brought death to many. Later his role seems to change as he demonstrates his willingness to take the disaster of the people on himself, and he pleads for them, I Chronicles 21.17.

9. All this took place on Mount Moriah, the later site of Solomon's Temple.⁴ There, in the continual worship life of the Jews, Christ was depicted in *Shadow*. Temple worship and, indeed, the entire content of Old Testament Ceremonial Law is explained in Scripture as revealing Christ in *Shadow*. Colossians 2.16-17: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a *shadow* of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." (NIV)

10. This is how the tenth chapter of Hebrews begins. Hebrews 10.1-4: "For the law, having a *shadow* of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be

offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”⁵

11. Edersheim⁶ has identified the two essentials that defined the faith and worship of the ancient Hebrews. One was the *Mediating Priesthood*: someone – or individuals – appointed to stand between God and those who aroused His wrath by their sins against Him. The other was *Atonement*: a covering of sins with innocent blood. Both of these are, by definition, *Christian*. “For this reason, (Jesus) had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people,” Hebrews 2.17, NIV.

12. Hebrews 8.3-6: “For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things... But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”

13. Hebrews 10.8-10: “‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.”

14. We find Christ at the heart of all God’s promises, and all sacred history and worship life. It’s because of God’s earnest desire that we have life and salvation in Him, and that none of us be found to have fallen short of it (Hebrews 4.1), that we come to these verses.

Hebrews 10.26-31

Verses 26-27: Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἀμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας, οὐκέτι περὶ ἀμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία, φοβερὰ δέ τις ἐκδοχὴ κρίσεως καὶ πυρὸς ζῆλος ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος τοὺς ὑπεναντίους.

“For if we deliberately sin on, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery jealousy, which is about to consume the adversaries.”

Verses 28-29: ἀθετήσας τις νόμον Μωϋσέως χωρὶς οἰκτιρμῶν ἐπὶ δυσὶν ἢ τρισὶν μάρτυσιν ἀποθνήσκει· πόσω δοκεῖτε χείρονος ἀξιωθήσεται τιμωρίας ὁ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπατήσας καὶ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης κοινὸν ἠγησάμενος, ἐν ᾧ ἡγιάσθη, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος ἐνυβρίσας;

“Anyone who has defied the Law of Moses dies without pity in the presence of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment do you think he’ll be counted worthy, who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, regarded the Blood of the Testament by which he was sanctified as profane, and insulted the Spirit of Grace?”

Verses 30-31: οἴδαμεν γὰρ τὸν εἰπόντα· ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω. καὶ πάλιν· κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ. φοβερὸν τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ζῶντος.

“For we know the One who said, ‘Retribution is Mine; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.”

Part One: A Hard Knot

15. There remains a question concerning the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews 2.3 would indicate that the author comes after the Holy Apostles, and that he stands in the relationship of a student to them. St. Paul, then, has not written this letter (at least not directly), nor any of the Eleven. Clement of Alexandria and Origen both believed this letter was in some sense Pauline⁷. Tertullian ascribed authorship to Barnabas⁸. Luther has suggested Apollos, but to him the matter of authorship was of only little concern, notwithstanding the letter's status and use down through history.⁹

16. For Luther, the real issue with the letter to the Hebrews was one of content, expressed in three sections, all treating more or less the same subject matter:

There is a hard knot in the fact that in chapters 6 (:4-6) and 10 (:26-31) it flatly denies and forbids to sinners any repentance after baptism; and in chapter 12 (:17) it says that Esau sought repentance and did not find it. This [seems, as it stands, to be] contrary to all the gospels and to St. Paul's epistles; and although one might venture an interpretation of it, the words are so clear that I do not know whether that would be sufficient.¹⁰

17. St. Chrysostom wrote in his *Homily on Hebrews 10.26-27*:

At this place we are again assailed by those who take away repentance, and by those who delay to come to Baptism; the one saying, that it is not safe for them to come to Baptism, since there is no second remission; and the other asserting that it is not safe to impart the Mysteries¹¹ to those who have sinned, if there is no second remission. What shall we say then to them both?¹²

18. Indeed, Scripture teaches examples of those who—once sanctified—had fallen into deliberate sin, and were later restored. Their sin had constituted a real fall from grace. Romans 8.13, NIV: “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by

the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” CFW Walther wrote:

Rom.6,14 we read: “For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the Law, but under grace.” What the apostle actually says in this text is that sin shall not be able to dominate Christians. It is absolutely impossible that a person who is in a state of grace should be ruled by sin. A pilgrim traveling on a lonely road, when attacked by a highwayman, escapes from him at the first opportunity. He does not want to be overcome and slain. Christians are pilgrims through this world on their way to heaven. The devil like a highway robber assaults them, and they go down before him because of their weakness, not because they meant to go down. To a true Christian his fall is forgiven because he turns to God in daily repentance with tears or at least heartfelt sighings for pardon. If a person allows sin to rule him, this is a sure sign that he is not a Christian, but a hypocrite, no matter how pious he pretends to be.¹³

19. King David fell into sins in which he lived for an entire year before he was restored through Nathan the prophet. St. Peter fell into open, public denial before he was reduced to contrition at the sound of the rooster and a look from Jesus. The Lord Jesus had urged him: “***When you have turned***, strengthen your brothers.”

20. Beyond these examples, the restoration of the wandering is to be an ongoing pursuit of the church and her ministers by the Word. The direction for church discipline found in Matthew 18 is not intended just to preserve the Christian congregation from internal corruption. It’s primary purpose is to restore the fallen sinner himself. St. Paul’s pastoral writing in I Corinthians is consistent with this purpose. 5.1: “It is actually reported ***that there is*** sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father’s wife.” 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.” (NKJV)

21. Even with respect to daily Christian life, the Lord Jesus says:

“‘If thy brother, (that is, another who is a Christian,) sins against thee, and repents, forgive him, not only seven times, but seventy times seven times,’ Mt. 19.21-22, Lk. 17.3-4. Accordingly, our Augsburg Confession condemns the error of the Novations, “who would not absolve such as had fallen after Baptism, though they returned to repentance.”¹⁴

22. In trying to harmonize these verses in Hebrews chapters six and ten with the rest of Scripture, RCH Lenski and Franz Pieper are in agreement, viewing these verses as treating of *the sin against the Holy Ghost*. Lenski writes: “Hortation merges into sharpest warning, yet it does so in a natural way. Some are abandoning the Christian Church (v.25). There is danger of apostasy and of what has been called ‘the sin against the Holy Ghost,’ or ‘the unpardonable sin.’ It is the second time that the writer issues this warning; *we should combine 6.4-8 with 10.26-31.*”¹⁵

23. Pieper defines the sin against the Holy Ghost with reference to St. Matthew 12.22-32; also its parallel passages. He distinguishes it from simple unbelief, and finds a connection to these references from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus said, Matthew 12.31-32:

Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age to come*.

24. Pieper’s comments on this passage:

(The) Pharisees were powerfully impressed by the miracle performed by Jesus. It had the same effect on them as it had upon the common people... yet these Pharisees, though they had the inner conviction that this was a divine miracle, blasphemed with the worst possible blasphemy: they declared it to be a satanic work... Hereupon Christ warned against the one great sin which, unlike other sins, is not forgiven. Accordingly we must give this definition: The sin against the Holy Ghost is committed when, after the Holy Ghost has convinced a person

in his heart of the divine truth, that person nevertheless not only rejects the truth he is convinced of, but also blasphemes it. Hollaz thus describes this sin: “The sin against the Holy Ghost is the malicious denial of the divine truth which a person has clearly understood and approved in his conscience, a hostile assault on it, horrible blaspheming, and an obstinate rejection of all means of grace, which lasts to the end.”¹⁶

25. Later in his treatment Pieper writes:

The passages Heb. 6.4-8 and Heb. 10.26-27 can be harmonized with Matthew 12, etc., only by assuming that they, too, deal with the *peccatum in Spiritum Sanctum*. They, too, clearly deny the possibility of a renewed repentance in the case of those “who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift,” but then sin “willfully.”¹⁷

26. The way Lenski and Pieper understood these verses from Hebrews indicates that they addressed a specific sin, which would make it, in a practical sense, unpardonable. While that resolves the tension, the question remains as to whether or not their conclusions are warranted by the context. Do these verses apply to those persons *only* who belligerently resist the gracious operation of the Holy Ghost in Word and Sacrament—in other words, hardened delinquents? How will we understand the “impossibility” stated in chapter 6, and implicit in these verses? In any case, we proceed with the confident expectation that these passages stand in harmony with the rest of Scripture, and that they will not need to be forced into a meaning that context doesn’t suggest.

27. This paper contends that these rather difficult verses, Hebrews 6.4-8 and Hebrews 10.26-31, are bookends to the Christian life. With these words, God is at work to deliver us from two great pitfalls that threaten one who has come to know the truth. On one hand, there is the danger of persisting in legalism, veiled behind an outwardly Christian confession. On the other hand, there is the danger of presumption of divine grace while persisting in impenitence and deliberate sin. God’s good and gracious will is to save us from both.

28. If at first Scripture's turn of phrase seems difficult to understand or adopt, "a plain Christian should be satisfied with this: that the Holy Spirit knows quite well how to teach us the manner in which we should speak, and we need no trope-makers or crap-shooters."¹⁸ This is well taken: we therefore aspire to make no tropes, and shoot no craps.

Part Two: No More Sacrifice for Sins

29. The Epistle to the Hebrews seems to have been written before the fall of Jerusalem. The author discusses the temple services as though ongoing. Nevertheless, to his mind the temple services have already played out their part in salvation history.

30. The New Testament has forever replaced the Old Covenant. A greater Sacrifice has replaced the repeated temple sacrifices, once and for all. A greater Priest, with a surpassing Ministry has come, Who is the final and only answer as to how sinners are both justified and sanctified, "For by one offering He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy," Hebrews 10.14.

31. The verses immediately preceding our text point the believer to the source and central focus of new life: the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching, Hebrews 10.19-25, NKJV.

Verses 26-27: Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἁμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας, οὐκέτι περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία, φοβερὰ δέ τις ἐκδοχὴ κρίσεως καὶ πυρὸς ζῆλος ἐσθίειν μέλλοντος τοῦς ὑπεναντίους.

“For if we deliberately sin on, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery jealousy, which is about to consume the adversaries.”

32. “Sin on,” ἁμαρτανόντων, is a **present active participle**. The sin under discussion, whatever it may be, continues unrepented in the life of the sinner. It speaks to a habit, or intentional behavior. More to the point, it speaks to a hardening of the heart, rather than a momentary lapse of spiritual judgment, or a temporary succumbing to temptation. Beck’s translation is excellent in the way it reflects the thought: “If we choose to go on sinning after we have learned the truth, there is no more sacrifice for our sins.”

33. But already in these first words, commentators find different meanings. Lenski writes: “Sinning in ignorance or weakness is not referred to, but the deliberate, voluntary sinning of one who has really received the knowledge which is the realization of the divine, saving truth, the actual reality of the gospel contents.”¹⁹

34. In contrast, Lange sees something different: “The reference here is not to deliberate and heinous sins in general, but to apostasy from Christianity after regeneration.”²⁰ One immediately wonders how we may commit deliberate, heinous sins without apostasy. But here is a real difference of opinion: is this text addressing manifest wickedness in general, or specifically, the sin of renunciation of the faith and continuing unbelief, which becomes manifest in the forsaking of the assembling together, as is the manner of some?

35. We recall how chapter ten leads up to these verses: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith... Let us hold fast the confession of **our** hope without wavering...Let us not give up

meeting together (NIV.)” That perhaps supports the idea that the sin being addressed is the forsaking of worship, and perhaps also an attendant verbal and outward denial of the faith. This could be construed as lending support for Lenski and Pieper’s position. Yet (for the moment, anyway,) we may sidestep the question. Since Luther, Lenski, Pieper, and others all see a connection between these verses and 6.4-6, they may shed light.

36. The writer leads up to those verses in this way, Hebrews 5:12 NIV : “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food... 6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of *repentance from acts that lead to death*, and of *faith in God*...”

Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας, γευσαμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου καὶ μετόχους γεννηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ καλὸν γευσαμένους θεοῦ ῥῆμα δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος καὶ παραπεσόντας, πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν, ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας.

“For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.” (NKJV)

37. The main verb, not appearing in the Greek text, is the verb *to be*. *It is* impossible... to renew them again (ἀνακαινίζειν, a present active infinitive), if they fall (παραπεσόντας, an aorist active participle), since they crucify again (ἀνασταυροῦντας, another *present active participle*) for themselves the Son of God. The present active participle is the pattern that repeats, telling us in what way ‘it is impossible,’ and under what circumstances there would be ‘no more sacrifice for sins.’

38. A quote from *Basic Greek Syntax*, prepared by the NWC Greek department, (I had believed that I would never use it again:) “Only in indirect discourse does the participle show actual time; otherwise it denotes time relative to that of the main verb. Present... (participles denote the) same time as the main verb.”²¹ The participle can be understood causally: “It is impossible...because they go on crucifying again;” or in a simply temporal sense: “It is impossible...while they go on crucifying again;” or to express means: “It is impossible...through their crucifying on for themselves the Son of God.” Then also in chapter ten the grammar indicates: There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (if, or while, or through the circumstance that) we deliberately sin on.

39. Perhaps we’re relieved to see that the grammar doesn’t, after all, prohibit any restoration of a sinner who falls into sins after Baptism. In that case, we might think, all we have to do is to stop deliberately sinning on. But this would be ‘impossible’ by our own reason or strength. We depend completely on the operation of divine grace, and therefore it’s a matter of life and death if we should by any means wander from it.

40. The moral force of the thought is emphasized, if we may borrow a phrase, in who is doing the doing; Who is being crucified, and who goes on living. Those who at once fall (the aorist active participle, Hebrews 6) live on in their sin, and living, they refuse to die. Dead to God, they refuse to come to Him and live. But there is no place else to go.

41. In 10.18 it is meant for blessing to hear that no offering for sin is left. Anyone and everyone who repents and believes is forgiven, because Christ has paid for all sins. Any denial of objective justification is *de facto* a denial of the resurrection of our Lord, and that is forever out of the question. Christ lives, all sins are forgiven in Him, and whoever believes receives the benefit of His atonement. As Beck has it: “Now where sins are forgiven, there is no more sacrificing for sins.” But for such as have rejected that forgiveness in favor of sins, in an entirely different sense, no sacrifice for sins

is left. Whether outward, manifest sins, or Judaizing legalisms or moralizing are under consideration, it makes no difference in the end. CFW Walther was right to insist that there are only two classifications of men: those who are quickened to faith, and those who are not. Living is living. Dead is dead.

42. Still, it is perhaps beneficial to recognize different ‘kinds’ of death. There are different kinds of ‘sinning on,’ and different circumstances for unbelief. For a comprehensive treatment of sins that oppose the ministry and work of the Holy Ghost, please see Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word and Sacrament*, pp.107-108. A briefer delineation is warranted here.

43. There are those who do not know the truth, and not knowing, do not believe. Those we might call “simply dead.” There are others who know the truth, but through self-righteousness do not combine it with faith in their hearts, whom we might call “unwittingly dead.” There are still others who have been brought to a realization of the truth, but thereafter deliberately resist the operation of the gospel in their hearts. These we might call “deliberately dead.” This is madness, which fits the description of Jesus in Matthew 12. Then—perhaps best understood as a preliminary step toward the latter group—there are those who know the truth, but who, in favor of the momentary pleasure of sin, resist the direction of the Holy Spirit working in their hearts to bring their lives into conformity with God’s will. These we might call “dead with plans to recover.”

44. In this latter case, the sinner desires to enjoy his sin, not wishing that his condition should be permanent. No one wants to go to hell—but who would fail to enjoy the trip? This is perhaps the temptation that we and our parishioners most often face: to give ourselves over to that which we should not do, which yet appeals to our sinful desires.

“It is, accordingly, necessary to know and teach that when holy men, still having and feeling original sin, also daily repenting and striving with it, happen to fall into manifest sins as David into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, that then faith and the

Holy Spirit have departed from them [they cast out faith and the Holy Ghost]. For the Holy Ghost does not permit sin to have dominion, to gain the upper hand so as to be accomplished, but represses and restrains it so that it must not do what it wishes. But if it does what it wishes, the Holy Ghost and faith are certainly not present. For St. John says, I Ep. 3.9: Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, . . . and he cannot sin. And yet it is also the truth when the same St. John says, I Ep. 1.8: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."²²

45. Dr. Luther also said: Sin Boldly! He said it to the timid, who were terrified even in the daily exercise of their vocations. On the other extreme, there is a danger of security, perhaps particularly in our youth, in indulging the desires of the sinful flesh under the guise of valiant faith, or in the hope of turning again *at will*. This is *impossible*.

46. CS Lewis has vividly imagined a devil's perspective on temptation:

We direct the fashionable outcry of each generation against those vices of which it is least in danger, and fix its approval on the virtue nearest to that vice which we are trying to make endemic. The game is to have them all running about with fire extinguishers whenever there is a flood, and all crowding to that side of the boat which is already nearly gunwale under.²³

47. If he falls from faith, the one-time Christian, who once truly enjoyed his Sabbath rest in grace alone, will try to justify what he has done. Rather than hiding in the wounds of Jesus, he will hide behind them, so to speak, to nurse his sin, even while he loudly claims 'grace alone' for himself and to anyone who will listen.

48. If he falls away, he will find others who should take the blame, and he will take his comfort in comparisons. He will console himself with his own improvements, even as he grows more and more accustomed to his sin. If it occurs to him that he should repent, he will try to feel sorry under his own power, so that he might find value in his morose demeanor, or console himself with his sorrow. If

he comes to worship, and partakes of the Holy Supper, it is only with the goal in mind to ‘be a good Christian,’ rather than to apprehend Christ. If he falls away, he is dead. This is what God wants—and by His Word actively seeks—to save us from.

49. In sharp contrast to the gracious good will of God, the sinful nature easily, actively, and happily seeks out the things that result in death (Romans 6.21). The world accommodates it, and the devil encourages it: “In a perfect world, I would not leave my spouse, or seek intimacy beyond the bounds of marriage, but under the circumstances, since my wife is a cold fish, or my husband doesn’t satisfy my emotional needs, who could find fault with me? I’m only human.” Again, a person will resist temptation, and having fulfilled that ‘obligation,’ he may now let his guard down. There’s a sense of safety and even self-satisfaction in choosing the lesser of two evils, like Judah, who suggested only selling his brother Joseph into slavery, rather than killing him.²⁴

50. We were taught of old to view sin as *leaven*, which works its way through an entire lump. We were taught of old to view it as *leprosy*, which is uncleanness that completely defiles a person and renders him dead even while he lives. We are slow to believe it, and the sinful nature delights in finding reasons why God’s Words don’t apply to me.²⁵

51. But, Galatians 5:19, “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that *those who live like this* will not inherit the kingdom of God.” “Those who live like this” simply refers to those who *deliberately sin on*. In the verses in Hebrews, the writer is telling us the same truth that St. Paul teaches: ‘You can’t have it both ways.’²⁶ Such a double life—a Christian faith, while persisting in deliberate sin—is what the writer says is *impossible*. (Or specific to chapter 10, as long as we persist in sin, impenitent, no sacrifice for sin is left.) As Luther puts it: “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in

saying: ‘Repent ye,’ intended that the whole life of believers should be penitence.”²⁷ The ancients clearly understood this: “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. Keep your servant also from willful sins, may they not rule over me.”

52. In that light, every sin carries the threat of becoming mortal sin, especially if we come to view it as venial. Our pet sins may easily become our red lentil stew, (Genesis 25.29-34; Hebrews 12.14-17) and no amount of worldly sorrow can buy back a sold birthright.²⁸ Indeed, the opposite of making one’s calling and election sure must be to cast it into doubt, to *disbelieve* that one died with Christ, and to live as though not buried with Him. But God has not given us these wonderful words and promises that we should in any way doubt or deny them.

Intermission

53. At this time we pause, so that each may make confession to the brother nearest him. In all seriousness, this entire discussion underscores our complete dependence on the Lord Jesus and His Good Spirit for everything of forgiveness, faith, and perseverance. He hasn’t left us without comfort, but gives us Confession and Holy Absolution, and every assurance in the Sacraments. The comfort we have in Him is objective and changeless—not merely that we may diagnose ourselves as not being in a state of mortal sin, or as not having committed in some way a sin against the Holy Ghost. We are baptized into Christ. We are clothed with Him and fed on Him. In Christ, all our sins are forgiven. “If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and He knows all things.” (1 John 3.20)

54. It is the devil’s lie that we depend on sins for our sense of identity and enjoyment of life. Our need for identity is answered in Holy Baptism, Galatians 3.26-27: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Christ is the end of our life in sin, and we rise with Him, Romans 6: “For we know that our old self

was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

55. In what sense might we say that we’re free from sin, since we feel it at work in us so actively? In answer, we are freed from the guilt of sin, because Christ was found guilty in our place. We are freed from the punishment of sin, because not we, but He was punished for them. And we are freed from the dominion of sin.

56. Hebrews 9:13-14, NIV: “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

57. At this point we are confronted with a paradox. The freedom that we will finally enjoy in heaven is here experienced in frustration. Galatians 5:17, NIV: “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” Nevertheless it is truly freedom, because sin does not, and cannot rule over the Christian.

To feel temptation is therefore a far different thing from consenting to it or yielding to it. We must all feel it, although not all in the same manner, but some in a greater degree and more severely than others... such feeling, as long as it is against our will and we would rather be rid of it, can harm no one. For if we did not feel it, it could not be called a temptation. But to consent thereto is when we give it reins and do not resist or pray against it.²⁹

58. “The Christian’s repentance consists in this, that he desires to commit these sins no more. Whoever commits these sins intentionally has, by that token, a proof that he is not a Christian, but a reprobate, who is moved, not by the Spirit of God, but by the hellish spirit.”³⁰ Therefore as part of our baptismal liturgy we are

asked: “Do you renounce the devil, and all his works and all his ways?” and in the divine service: “Do you promise henceforth to amend your sinful life?” These questions serve not as qualifications for absolution, but they give occasion for heartfelt expression of contrition and repentance, and proof that there is room in the heart, so to speak, that the grace truly proffered will be truly received. The Lord Jesus forgives freely, and with forgiveness grants deliverance from sin’s dominion.

59. This is truly grace, even though we experience it here in such frustration. Sin was a cruel master, bringing suffering in this life, and in eternity. Sin called down the punishment of God: in hardening of heart in this life, and eternal fire in the day of Judgment. But Jesus is our Lord who has redeemed us from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death, that we should be His own. By faith we receive our sabbath rest.³¹

60. If we should stray from God’s rest and perish, the fault lies not with God, but with us.³²

It is to be diligently considered that when God punishes sin with sins, that is, when He afterwards punishes with obduracy and blindness those who had been converted, because of their subsequent security, impenitence, and willful sins, this should not be interpreted to mean that it never had been God’s good pleasure that such persons should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. For both these facts are Gods’ revealed will: First, that God will receive into grace all who repent and believe in Christ. Secondly, that He also will punish those who willfully turn away from the holy commandment, and again entangle themselves in the filth of the world, 2 Pet 2.20, and garnish their hearts for Satan, Luke 11.25 f., and do despite to the Spirit of God, Heb. 10.29, and that they shall be hardened, blinded, and eternally condemned if they persist therein.³³

61. Here we might picture ourselves on a Minnesota Road in a snowstorm. Exactly where the ditch begins is unclear. The driver comes to realize it only when it’s too late. This is the danger of flirting with sins. The opposite danger that confronts us would be

to so carefully avoid the one ditch, that we go off on the other side. This is the danger of moralism. That danger is present for all of us because we are natural-born legalists.³⁴ It loomed large for the Hebrews, because they stood at the threshold of the New Testament, truly having crossed over into it, yet with the religious and cultural impetus (the *temptation*) to go back.

62. This temptation is particularly addressed in chapter six. The foundation that is being threatened, 6.1, is “the foundation of *repentance from acts that lead to death*, and of *faith in God*.” The verses that follow have the same import as what St. Paul wrote, Galatians, 2.15-16: NKJV: “We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” It is *impossible*.

63. Again, the point the writer to the Hebrews makes is the same: a saving Christian faith that at the same time depends on the works of the Law is impossible. The reasons are clear: “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins,” Hebrews 10.4; and again, “without faith it is impossible to please God,” Hebrews 11.6. Again, we are confronted with the reality that one cannot have it both ways. St. Paul said as much to the Galatians, 5.4, NKJV: “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

64. It’s to everyone’s benefit, then, that the writer has expended himself teaching that the Old Covenant has played out its part in salvation history. The sacrifices—even as they continued at that time—were of no avail. They were the shadows, not the realities. They were repeated over and over again, because they can never take sins away. The High Priest of the Old Covenant has performed his final functions, announcing, “It is better that One Man die for the people.” As befitting his office, Joseph Caiaphas offered the Lamb of God for sacrifice, and in that very act, tore his robes, (an

act forbidden in Scripture, Lev. 21.10) indicating in spite of himself that his priesthood was at an end. Forty years later, Jerusalem fell, not having known the day of visitation.

Who shall make answer to (the) deep lament of exiled Judah? Where shall a ransom be found to take the place of their sacrifices? In their despair, some appeal to the merits of the fathers or of the pious; others to their own or to Israel's sufferings; or to death, which is regarded as the last expiation. But the most melancholy exhibition, perhaps, is that of an attempted sacrifice by each pious Israelite on the eve of the Day of Atonement. Taking for males a white cock, and for females a hen, the head of the house prays: 'the children of men who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in misery and iron—they will He bring forth from darkness and the shadow of death, and break their bonds asunder. Fools, because of their transgressions and because of their iniquities are afflicted; their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saves them out of their distresses. He sends His word, and heals them, and delivers them from their destruction. Then they praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His marvelous works to the children of men. If there be an angel with Him, an intercessor, one among a thousand, to show unto men his righteousness, then He is gracious unto him, and saith, "Let him go, that he may not go down into the pit; I have found an atonement." Next, the head of the house swings the sacrifice around his head, saying, "This is my substitute; this is in exchange for me; this is my atonement. This cock goes into death, but may I enter into a long and happy life, and into peace!" Then he repeats this prayer three times, and lays his hands on the sacrifice, which is now slain.³⁵

65. There aren't words for the horrible sadness and emptiness. Such a sacrifice has no command or promise from God. But it aptly pictures the darkness and futility of man's efforts to save himself.³⁶ It is not always this obvious. Just as we may slip into sins and fall from grace before we realize it, (and perhaps we never would,) again, we may fall into legalizing tendencies before we're even aware.

Great and grievous indeed are these dangers and temptations which every Christian must bear, even though each one were alone by himself, so that every hour that we are in this vile life

where we are attacked on all sides, chased and hunted down, we are moved to cry out and to pray that God would not suffer us to become weary and faint and to relapse into sin, shame, and unbelief. For otherwise it is impossible to overcome even the least temptation.³⁷

66. In the case of a fall from grace into legalism, the illustration of death remains apt. A person who has just died may still be warm to the touch. He may seem as though he might turn and speak to you—not at all like those long since turned to dust, nor again like those who are obviously in decay. But dead is dead. In man, there is no power to come to life; nor is there power to recover another. Even in mission work with the living, active Word of God, we wait on the Spirit of God to work faith when and where He wills. We cannot do it, it is *impossible*.

67. To bring life out of death remains the prerogative of God. Accordingly, Christ is the One who raises the dead, whether from the bed, or from the bier, or from the grave. He Himself answered the question of soteriology: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” We should stand in awe of Him who alone has power over life and death.

Part Three: The Great New Testament

Verses 28-29: ἀθετήσας τις νόμον Μωϋσέως χωρὶς οἰκτιρμῶν ἐπὶ δυσὶν ἢ τρισὶν μάρτυσιν ἀποθνήσκει· πόσω δοκεῖτε χείρονος ἀξιωθήσεται τιμωρίας ὁ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπατήσας καὶ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης κοινὸν ἡγήσάμενος, ἐν ᾧ ἡγιασθη, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτος ἐνυβρίσας;

“Anyone who has defied the Law of Moses dies without pity in the presence of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment do you think he’ll be counted worthy, who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, regarded the Blood of the Testament by which he was sanctified as profane, and insulted the Spirit of Grace?”

68. The writer first calls to mind the full severity of the Old Covenant

against willful rebellion and disobedience. Under the Old Covenant, sins of ignorance and of weakness are atoned for. Deliberate sins result in death. Ceremonial Law reflects the same. Exodus 12.15: “For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel.” Exodus 31.14: “Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people.” Numbers 15.30: “But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people.” (NIV)

69. It is this writer’s considered opinion that the severity of the Old Covenant depicts in *shadow* the reality of the New Testament. On one hand, you cannot be a Christian while yet persisting in deliberate sins. On the other hand, you cannot be a Christian and persist in reposing faith in your own effort. In either case, the Son of God is trampled underfoot. (But yes, we are that close to Him.)

70. In ancient temple worship, the worshipper was continually confronted with “lines of sanctity.”³⁸ Ever before him was the distinction between the common and the holy. The sacred and the profane were continually depicted in the question as to who was worthy to continue ascending to the Temple Mount, and then to the Court of Women, and then to the Court of Israel, then the Court of Priests, and finally into the Temple itself, where the priests alone were allowed to go, only after ceremonial washing.

71. The priesthood of the New Testament consists however, to use Luther’s words, of holy believers. The Letter to the Hebrews brings us to understand that both the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Melchizedek³⁹ find their antitype in Christ. He continues as the Intercessor, and saves the people by His atonement once for all, through faith in His blood. Those who are being saved are set apart by Him for lives of holiness: “You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises

of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

72. Those who could not approach the shewbread, which depicted the Savior only in type, now in fact eat the greater reality in Holy Communion. Those who could not approach the Holy Place now enter the Holiest to feast with Him, and to drink from the cup in which the whole New Testament consists, since the temple curtain—that is, His body—has been opened. Those who spurn Holy Communion sin against Him. Those who eat not recognizing the body of the Lord sin against Him. But again, those who partake self-righteously, or with willful intent to continue in sin, do so inviting a much worse punishment that befell Aaron’s sons—they regard the New Testament in Jesus’ blood as profane. It is not: it is most holy.

73. The insult against His Spirit which is mentioned here might be spoken out loud, as some have understood the sin against the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, some have rightly observed that that sin which is not forgiven is the sin of unbelief, which resides in the heart.⁴⁰ Martin Chemnitz wrote:

Since the sins by which one resists the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit have this special and characteristic mark, that they harden the heart of man and make it obstinate... and God, in His just judgment, usually censured them for the most part, by forsaking, hardening, and blinding them, and giving them over to a reprobate mind (Ro 11.8, John 12.40), it happens that few, after they have persisted in those sins return to a sounder understanding and are converted... If someone remains in this kind of sins to the end of life, unmoved by repentance, and dies thus, the sentence of divine judgment revealed in the Word declares that it was a sin or affront against the Holy Spirit, and that of such a kind that it is forgiven neither in this world, nor in that which is to come; that is (as Chrysostom says), which is to be avenged in this life by hardening, in the other with eternal fire. Cf. Heb. 6.4-6; 10.26-27, 29.

These passages mean: For those who, after they once have been enlightened and made partakers of the Holy Spirit, knowingly and in obstinate wickedness again deny the acknowledged truth and completely fall away from Christ, and so persevere therein that, as it were, they crucify Christ anew, regard (Him)

as a joke, and tread (Him) underfoot, and insult the Spirit of Grace—for those, I say, there remains no remission of sins, but the prospect of the judgment of God and of eternal fire. For they do not return to repentance, and without Christ there remains no offering for sins. For thus are these rather difficult passages of the Epistle to the Hebrews explained by the context itself.⁴¹

74. So God is at work in these words from Hebrews six and ten, to keep us from terrible self-righteousness and pride on the one hand, terrible wickedness and sins on the other, lest we be lost in an attempt to live two lives at once. This is what the writer to the Hebrews says is *impossible*, and what renders one without any remaining sacrifice for sins.

75. Both these apostasies, though they might seem so very different, are in the last analysis very much the same. This lesson has been taught from the beginning: Psalm 78.18, 22: “They willfully put God to the test...for *they did not believe in God* or *trust in his deliverance*.” Again, Hebrews 3.12, 16-19: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God... Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter *because of their unbelief*.”

76. Calling evil good; considering God unjust and withholding something that would make life worth living; regarding life as being not in Him but in us—in our pleasures, or in our righteousness: this must be unbelief. If one who has been saved from this turns again, “the last state of that person is worse than the first.” He may not be unbelieving and claim salvation by faith at the same time. It is impossible.

77. So this must also finally be a text about rightly dividing Law and Gospel. Only the Law is to be preached to those who persist secure in their sins. To such, the impossibility must be left with

all its terrible force. As to the purpose it serves now, it is just this *impossibility* and impending hell that could mortify the sinful flesh. It pierces the heart—so that through contrition, the door of repentance is opened for us. With His Mighty Word, our God is the One who does everything for our salvation. So it is at this point that we come to this paper’s true conclusion.

78. Interestingly, Luther seemed to understand the meaning of the text differently in his earlier career, perhaps closer to its intended sense. From his lectures on Hebrews, April, 1517-March, 1518, he comments on chapter 10:

One can simply say that the words are to be understood as meaning what is stated in the last chapter of James (5.14 ff.), namely, in the way the apostle says that love “never ends, bears all things, etc.” (I Cor. 13.8, 7) In like manner the evangelist John says that “He who is born of God does not sin” (I John 3.9) and the like. From the opposite point of view one can also say that he who is outside Christ cannot repent. In both cases one must understand that there is perseverance; that is, just as he who is in grace cannot sin, no matter what he does, but remains in grace, so he who is in sin, cannot do good, no matter what he does, but remains in sins. Thus *in both cases he is describing the existing state of affairs*, not declaring a change to be impossible.²⁴²

79. Luther’s later stance on these verses can be traced to his deepened faith in, and great understanding of divine mercy, and heaven standing open to all men in Christ. Yet, we have to say that the writer to the Hebrews in no way denies this faith. “He does not take away repentance, nor does he thrust away and cast down with despair the fallen. He is not thus the enemy of our salvation.”²⁴³ Dr. U.V. Koren wrote:

It is therefore God’s will that we “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised.” (Hebrews 10.23) If we are troubled with the thought of how easily we can fall, and with what difficulty “our whole spirit and soul and body are preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” we are to pray and with Paul believe and say: “Faithful is he that called us, who also will do it.” (I

Thessalonians 5.23-24) He must do it, otherwise it will not be done: “for we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.” (I Peter 1.5) But we are also to rely firmly upon this power of God, for He has promised and said: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Hebrews 13.5), and therefore He wants us to cast all our care upon him. (I Peter 5.7)⁴⁴

Epilogue

Verses 30-31: οἶδαμεν γὰρ τὸν εἰπόντα· ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω. καὶ πάλιν· κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ. φοβερὸν τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ζῶντος.

“For we know the One who said, ‘Retribution is Mine; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.”

80. In Exodus chapter seventeen, God’s people Israel were attacked at Rephidim. With Joshua leading the men in battle, Moses climbed a hill overlooking the battlefield with his brother Aaron and a man named Hur. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. But whenever he lowered his hands, the enemy was overcoming them. It was not for them to trust in their own strength or bravery in battle. The battle was God’s, and he alone could give them the victory.

81. As the day wore on, Moses could no longer hold his hands up. He finally sinks, exhausted, on a rock they brought for him to sit on. He let Aaron and Hur each take one of his hands, and hold it in a position that they could maintain for the rest of the day, until the darkness came. This scene has come to our eyes before, and we know it: the man of God’s choosing, exhausted beyond standing, on the top of a hill with one man on his right and another his left, with his hands stretched out, to give us the victory.

82. Before *seeing* this, it was perhaps troubling to see how God dealt with the Amalekites from that day forward. Exodus 17:16, “He said,

‘The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.’” This word held true. But now God’s response to the Amalekites makes perfect sense. They forever typify those who wage war against the Holy Cross. If men should use Christ as a cloak for evil; if men should use Him as a pretext for their own holiness, they cannot prevail.

83. We today stand before Him as men who have sinned against Him, even on purpose. But we stand in the shadow of the hill where He shed His precious blood and died for us. We are washed clean, fed with true Bread from heaven, and in Him we are mercifully, freely and fully pardoned. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! —Amen.

unclean spirit/demon immediately recognized Jesus and shouted this out vehemently. Coming from a much more amicable source, Jesus’ identity is also confessed by Peter in 8:29 (D’). Two opposite sources—same confession.

Endnotes

- ¹ Rev. Wayne Vogt has published this approach in his instruction material, *Searching Scripture*.
- ² The Nile River meant *life* in Egyptian culture, and the dead crossed over Nile water to the western bank for the ‘next life.’ But Life here and now, and crossing over to a blessed Life hereafter, is by *Blood*. Thanks to Pr Steve Sparley, interviewed for this presentation.
- ³ Gerhard, pp.221-222
- ⁴ Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, p.2
- ⁵ Note that the temple sacrifices served both as a reminder of sins and the shadow of good things to come: they were a preaching of Law and Gospel.
- ⁶ Cf. *Ibid*, p.57
- ⁷ Guthrie, p.686.
- ⁸ Tertullian, *De Pudicitia*, cited from CSSB.
- ⁹ The Church teaches her doctrine from proof passages that are so clear, the only way to misunderstand them is to do so deliberately. Moreover, these passages are marshaled from those books about which Apostolic authorship is beyond question, and has never been in doubt.
- ¹⁰ LW 35:394-395. Note: The bracketed portion was [is] in the editions of the preface to this Epistle which appeared prior to 1530.
- ¹¹ Holy Communion.
- ¹² Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers, Vol. 14, p.457.
- ¹³ Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, p. 320.
- ¹⁴ AC XII, *Concordia Triglotta* p. 49.
- ¹⁵ Lenski, 355-356, emphasis added.
- ¹⁶ Pieper, Vol.1, p.572-573.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 575.
- ¹⁸ LW 37:210
- ¹⁹ Lenski, p.356-357.
- ²⁰ Lange, Vol.11, p.177.
- ²¹ NWC Greek Department, p.12
- ²² SA Part III, Art. 3, 42-45.
- ²³ Lewis, p.92.
- ²⁴ Yet it is through the betrayal of One, by His brothers, at the cost of thirty pieces of silver—the going price of a slave in Israel, Exodus 21.32—that we are delivered from sin and death.
- ²⁵ This seems to argue for a parabolic application of the Law wherever possible, as Nathan’s approach to David first suggests, 2 Samuel 12.7.
- ²⁶ This phraseology courtesy of Pr Alex Ring, interviewed for this presentation.
- ²⁷ Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, p.18.
- ²⁸ At this point, a glimpse at this writer’s understanding of Hebrews 12.17.
- ²⁹ LC 107-108, *Concordia Triglotta* p.729.
- ³⁰ Walther, p.320.

³¹ Christ died at the time of Evening Sacrifice on Good Friday, and was Risen at daybreak on Holy Easter day. He was in death for one Sabbath Day. The fact perhaps suggests a sermon outline for Holy Saturday or Holy Easter: Remember the Sabbath Day! 1. Because the only reason Jesus died was to give us Rest; 2. Because the only Rest we have is in His death.

³² “For few receive the Word and follow it; the greatest number despise the Word and will not come to the wedding, Matt. 22.3 ff. The cause for this contempt for the Word is not Gods’ foreknowledge [or predestination], but the perverse will of man, which rejects or perverts the means and instrument of the Holy Ghost, which God offers him through the call, and resists the Holy Ghost, who wishes to be efficacious, and works through the Word, as Christ says: How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not! Matt. 23,37. Thus many receive the Word with joy, but afterwards fall away again, Luke 8.13. But the cause is not as though God were unwilling to grant grace for perseverance to those in whom He has begun the good work, for that is contrary to St. Paul, Phil. 1.6; but the cause is that they wilfully turn away again from the holy commandment [of God], grieve and embitter the Holy Ghost, implicate themselves again in the filth of the world, and garnish again the habitation of the heart for the devil. With them the last state is worse than the first, 2 Pet 2.10, 20; Eph. 4.30; Heb. 10.26; Luke 11.25.”—FC SD XI, 41-42, *Concordia Triglotta* p. 1076

³³ FC SD XI, 83, *Concordia Triglotta* p. 1091

³⁴ That is: naturally seeking salvation in terms of Law and works.

³⁵ Edersheim, pp.88-89.

³⁶ Lange writes: “The offerings of the Law bring no true propitiation; self-originated offerings have not even the character of *type* and of *promise*,” p. 178.

³⁷ LC 105, *Concordia Triglotta* p.727.

³⁸ Edersheim, p.38.

³⁹ Luther comments on Psalm 110.4, *The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*. “There is much to be said about this priestly office. The text is unusually rich in meaning, for it comprehends the main articles of Christian doctrine. Nothing in Scripture is more comforting than what is said about the priestly office of our dear Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews points up the value of this text beautifully, and consequently it becomes the true commentary or interpretation of the Psalm. On this point, it is a right noble Epistle and deserves, on this account, to be written with golden ink.” LW 13:306

⁴⁰ Certain of our pastors, interviewed for this presentation.

⁴¹ Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments*, p. 108.

⁴² LW 29:227-228. Emphasis added.

⁴³ St. Chrysostom, *Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 14, p. 457.

⁴⁴ UV Koren, “Can and ought a Christian be certain of his salvation?” Reprinted in LSQ 43:2&3.

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A Possible Two-fold Chiastic Structure of the Gospel of Mark

Michael K. Smith

The Gospel of Mark, as is true of any biblical book, has been analyzed according to its structure countless times, which structures I do not claim to have studied much more than a scintilla. Adhering to the tenet that there is sometimes more room for speculation in the realm of exegesis, I offer the following.

As I began reading through the Gospel of Mark, I was struck by what I perceived to be two bookends: the Father's voice. In 1:11 God the Father spoke at Jesus' baptism, claiming him as ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός. At Jesus' transfiguration, God spoke the same words (9:7). The only difference between these two declarations was that at Jesus' baptism, God spoke to him (Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου...), and at Jesus' transfiguration, God spoke to the three disciples (Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου...).

My curiosity piqued, I began working forward from 1:11 and backward from 9:7 to see if additional parallels were in place. My conclusion is that such parallels exist, forming a distinct (if not complicated) chiasm. I also examined the Gospel subsequent to the account of the Transfiguration to determine if connections could be made with this initial chiasm. Reading the end of the Gospel (the "long" ending), I noted that in 16:19 Mark recorded that Jesus ἐκάλισεν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ. I took that to mean that God the Father had *demonstrated* Jesus to be his beloved Son. Again, working forward from 9:7 and backward from 16:19, I looked for parallels. Again, I perceived a definite chiastic structure.

Why look for chiasms in Mark's Gospel in the first place? In various places in his Gospel Mark makes use of this method, probably owing to the way the Semitic mind best comprehended stories (or any material, for that matter). Beginning with one bookend and closing with another, the narrator told his story making use of chiastic parallels. The heart of the chiasm was the primary point of the story.

The two primary chiasms¹ I propose in Mark's Gospel are attached as Appendices A & B. In short, Mark presents two emphases: the *kingdom of God* (Appendix A; Mark 1:1-9:12) and *Jesus as the beloved Son and chief/head of the corner* (Appendix B; Mark 9:2-16:19). In essence, these two emphases are equal, since God's kingdom is embodied in Christ Jesus. They also serve to answer Mark's question: *Who is the Son of God?* (4:41)

Explanation of the Chiastic Pairs

While not every pair of proposed parallel thought begs for extensive exposition, what follows are additional thoughts on these pairs of narrative.

Mark 1:1-9:12 – “The Kingdom of God” (Appendix A)

A + A' Note that in addition to the words of the Father, these sections are parallel also in the inclusion of John the Baptist (A) and “Elijah” (A') whom Jesus says has already come. These two passages form the bookends of the first chiasm.

B + B' Jesus' forty-day temptation in the wilderness in which he denies his own (human) interests (B) is paralleled by Jesus' making clear to his disciples that life as one of his followers *is* a life of self-denial (B').

C + C' This parallel is perhaps slightly tenuous. In 1:14-20, Jesus announces that He is now beginning his public ministry (C – Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), including *everything* that ministry will entail. He also calls the first disciples to be fishers of men. In 8:31-33, Jesus details the extent of his purpose in carrying out his ministry (C' – suffer, be rejected, be killed, rise). He also reminds Peter what being a follower means: to put one's own ideas of the kingdom in subjection to those of what the Lord desires.

Perhaps this parallel is more evident in the fact that in 1:14 Jesus is said to be κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ. In 8:31, Jesus details the *content* of that same preaching when he describes his salvific work, a message he proclaimed very boldly (8:32).

D + D' Mark records that after Jesus called his first disciples, he drove an unclean spirit out of a man while teaching in the synagogue (D). This unclean spirit/demon immediately recognized Jesus and shouted this out vehemently. Coming from a much more amicable source, Jesus' identity is also confessed by Peter in 8:29 (D'). Two opposite sources—same confession.

E + E' In 1:29-2:5 Mark records that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, many others who came to him, and a paralytic (E). The parallel to this is that Jesus healed a blind man (E'). Both passages show Jesus' power over sickness and suffering.

F + F' After Jesus healed the paralytic, the scribes make an accusation against Jesus that he was a blasphemer (2:7; F). In 8:10-12, it's the Pharisees vs. Jesus as they demand a miraculous sign from him (F'). Different occasions, different words, same motive.

G + G' Jesus continued to upset his opponents when he not only called a tax collector to be one of his disciples, but also went to Matthew's home to eat with his cohorts (G). Paralleling this account is the miraculous feeding of the four thousand (G'). While Mark does not note the specific association of Jesus with any undesirables, the Pharisees would have scoffed at Jesus' cavalier attitude toward his choice of dining companions.

H + H' In 2:18-3:6, Mark records that the Pharisees (and John's disciples) were questioning why Jesus' disciples did not fast (H). Jesus explains that he himself is the long-awaited Bridegroom/Messiah, the fulfillment of the OT law. The Pharisees also pounced on Jesus because his disciples picked heads of grain on the Sabbath. His response was virtually the same: κύριός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τοῦ σαββάτου (2:28). Jesus then heals the withered hand of a man on the Sabbath. Paralleling this account is 7:1-37 (H'), wherein the Pharisees and scribes complain that Jesus' disciples eat with unclean hands. Jesus explains what true purity is and what makes a person **טָמֵא**. Finally, he heals the daughter of a Samaritan woman and also a deaf man.

I + I' After healing the withered hand of the man on the Sabbath, great crowds came from all around to see Jesus and to ask for healings (I). Mark records in 6:53-56 (I') a parallel occurrence: crowds flocking to see Jesus and to have him heal their sick.

J + J' Again Mark states that the unclean spirits openly confess Jesus' identity (3:11; J). In an antithetical parallel (J'), Herod does *not* know who Jesus is, and the disciples do *not* understand the feeding of the five thousand, owing to their ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη (6:52). What a contrast!—the demons know who Jesus is and his power, but the devilish Herod and the dense disciples do not.

K + K' Mark records Jesus' choice/appointment of the Twelve (δώδεκα) as his apostles in 3:13-19 (K). Paralleling this occurrence nicely is the account of Jesus sending out the Twelve on a missionary journey (K').

L + L' What was the reaction of Jesus' family to him and his public ministry? Mark states in 3:21, ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη. In this section (L) the scribes also accuse Jesus of being in league with Beelzebul. Jesus corrects their false teaching and also defines his true family members. As a parallel Jesus is rejected by his fellow Nazarenes, who are amazed that this man whose "father," mother, etc. they know claims to be more than simply one of them (L').

M + M' In one of Jesus' five (or four) parables recorded by Mark, Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God by means of a farming illustration, the parable of the sower and the different types of soil (M). Part of the emphasis in this parable is to speak of the growth of faith. Mark lays this alongside examples of three people—the Gergasene demoniac, Jairus, and the woman with the twelve-year flow of blood—whose faith did indeed grow or was produced (M').

N + N' Inching closer to the chiasmic climax, Mark next records Jesus' words concerning the lamp on the lampstand (displaying one's faith) and the growth of faith (N; ὃς γὰρ ἔχει, δοθήσεται αὐτῷ [4:25]). Such faith is *not* seen in the parallel (N'), wherein the disciples faithlessly fear for their lives when caught in a storm at sea. However, Jesus reveals his power to them in order to bring about strengthening of their faith.

O + O' This is the center of the first chiasm. What did Jesus come to proclaim? Again, from 1:15, Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Jesus came. Jesus came to this world *as* the Kingdom of God in bodily form. In the Catechism we speak of God's kingdom consisting of his gracious rule in our hearts, and that is exactly what Jesus does. As Jesus

carries out his work, now through his royal priests (1 Pe 2:9), his kingdom is indeed expanded. We are in the same realm of awareness as the man scattering the seed in the text, because we do not understand how the kingdom grows (ὡς οὐκ οἶδεν αὐτός - O). That same inexplicable kingdom grows large not only in our hearts, but also in the hearts of others. Such an insignificant-looking thing, the mustard seed (O')—such an insignificant-looking person, Jesus.

Mark 9:2-13 – 16:20 – “The Beloved Son” (Appendix B)

A + A' As mentioned previously, the first half of this pair is the last part of the first chiasm: Jesus' transfiguration (A). The parallel in this second chiasm is recorded in 16:19, Jesus being seated at the right hand of the Father (A'). This fulfillment of Ps 110:1 echoes God's declaration to the disciples in 9:7.

B + B' Following his transfiguration, Jesus next drives an evil spirit from a young boy (B). He performs this miracle after his disciples failed. Just prior to the end of his Gospel, Mark records that Jesus told his disciples, σημεία δὲ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ταῦτα παρακολουθήσει· ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου δαιμόνια ἐκβαλοῦσιν, γλώσσαις λαλήσουσιν καιναῖς, [καὶ ἐν ταῖς χερσίν] ὄφεις ἄροῦσιν κἄν θανάσιμόν τι πῖωσιν οὐ μὴ αὐτοὺς βλάβῃ, ἐπὶ ἄρρωστους χεῖρας ἐπιθήσουσιν καὶ καλῶς ἕξουσιν (16:17-18; B'). Note the inclusion of Jesus' followers being able to drive out demons.

C + C' In keeping with avoiding undue popularity, after healing the demon-possessed boy Jesus οὐκ ἤθελεν ἵνα τις γινῶι (9:30; C). While this was a common theme in Mark's Gospel, it does make an interesting antithetic parallel with the risen Jesus making himself quite apparent to Mary, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the Eleven; and his commissioning his followers to spread the message about him (C').

D + D' One of the reasons Jesus did not want the extreme attention after healing the demon-possessed boy was that he needed to explain his mission once more to his disciples. He summarizes that mission by speaking of his betrayal, death, and resurrection (D). The parallel to this is the lengthiest section in Mark's Gospel, the actual account of Jesus betrayal, death, and resurrection (14:43-16:8; D').

E + E' Foreshadowing a similar occurrence, the disciples contended over who was the greatest (9:34; E). After receiving instruction from Jesus via words and an object lesson about greatness in the kingdom, the disciples also expressed thinly-veiled jealousy about someone who was οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν yet driving out demons in Jesus' name (9:38). As a demonstration that perhaps the disciples had no reason for boasting, Mark parallels this with a description of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, including the fact that the disciples could not stay awake in support of their Suffering Savior (E'). Jesus demonstrated what true greatness was: submitting to the will of the Father.

F + F' Jesus never wanted anyone to stumble in his faith, nor for one of his followers to cause someone to stumble in their faith. He emphasizes this in 9:42-50, using a powerful description of the “millstone around the neck” and graphic (not literal/physical) expressions of lengths to which someone might go to avoid hell (F). Jesus predicts this will happen with his closest followers in the parallel (F'), when on “Maundy Thursday” Jesus sadly informs the disciples that on that very night Πάντες σκανδαλισθήσεθε... (14:27).

G + G' In an encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus takes the opportunity to discuss the sanctity of the marriage bond (G). On the night Jesus was betrayed, he instituted his Holy Supper (G'), which also foreshadowed the great wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9). The bond between Christ and his Church is indeed sacred.

H + H' Even after Jesus had told the disciples the value he placed on children (9:37), the disciples tried to keep children from being brought to Jesus (10:13; H), in part betraying Jesus' purpose in serving as Savior of the world (τῶν γὰρ τοιοῦτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ - 10:14). As a parallel, Mark juxtaposes the betrayal plot by Judas (H').

I + I' Again, Jesus loved children and wanted them to be close to him. He welcomed them gladly after the disciples tried to keep them away (I). In 14:3-9 (I'), Jesus gladly accepted an act of childlike faith: Mary's anointing, which he considered a καλὸν ἔργον.

J + J' The rich young man had come to Jesus sincerely seeking the kingdom (J). However, he went away from Jesus λυπούμενος,

because his riches were more important to him (10:22). Mark parallels this sad incident with the plotting of the chief priests and scribes (J'), who were definitely more interested in holding on to their power and wealth.

K + K' After discussing with Jesus the case of the rich young man, Peter asked Jesus what was in store for the disciples, since they had given up πάντα in order to follow him (10:28; K). Jesus assures his faithful that they will receive much both in this world and in the next, the best "reward" being eternal life in the coming world. Jesus predicts the end of this world and the coming of the next in Mark's parallel (K'), throughout assuring his followers that he is telling them these things because of his concern that they be ready.

L + L' As he begins his final trip to Jerusalem, Mark records that Jesus ἦν προάγων αὐτοῦς (10:32; L). Apparently Jesus was quite resolute in his demeanor, because Mark records that the disciples ἐθαμβοῦντο. He was going to Jerusalem one last time to give his entire self, even in the face of what would happen (which he describes more graphically than on previous occasions). Laid alongside of this determination to give everything he has is the account of the widow who gave πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν (12:44; L').

M + M' Echoing a previous discussion among the disciples, James and John come to Jesus asking for places of honor in Jesus' glory (in the glorious realization of his kingdom; 10:37; M). Mark parallels this request with Jesus' severe condemnation of the scribes who sought their own benefit and glory (M').

N + N' On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus encountered a blind man named Bartimaeus. This poor beggar expressed his faith in Jesus by shouting to him, Υἱὲ Δαυὶδ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με (10:47; N). When Jesus entered Jerusalem, what did the people shout? Εὐλογημένη ἡ ἐρχομένη βασιλεία τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Δαυὶδ Ὡσαννά ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις (11:10). While the faith expressed here may not have been as deep as that of Bartimaeus (since many in the crowds turned against Jesus later in the week), the people still confessed Jesus to be the Son of David. Juxtaposed to these confessions of Jesus as the Son of David is Jesus' question (rhetorical or not) about the scribes' understanding of Ps 110:1, how David's Son could also be David's Lord (N').

O + O' "Repent!" is part of the message of Jesus causing the fig tree to wither and cleansing the temple (O). Those in the temple had their hearts set on riches and not on the Lord. Parallel to this section is the account of the scribe who came to Jesus asking about the most important commandment (O'). Jesus' reply made it clear that one needed to keep God central in his life, not just in thought but also in action (as he demonstrates love to his neighbor).

P + P' God's power is highlighted in 11:20-26 (P). Only the living God has the power over nature (the fig tree), and only the living God can answer the prayers of his faithful. That God is a living God is quite clear throughout Scripture, as Jesus makes plain to the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (P'). The *ἐγὼ εἰμι* of the OT is the ruler of the living.

Q + Q' When asked by the religious leaders by whose authority Jesus worked (especially as seen in cleansing the temple), he cleverly answered them by making reference to John the Baptizer's baptism (Q). His point? The same one who gave John the authority to baptize gave Jesus the authority to carry out his work. Part of this authority is the governance of the entire universe, made clear by Jesus' answer to those trying to trip him up with a question about the poll tax (Q').

R + R' The center of this second chiasm revolves around the parable of the vineyard/the wicked tenants (12:1-12). While a searing condemnation of the religious leaders of the Jews, this parable also focuses on the *υἷον ἀγαπητόν* (12:6; R). This beloved son is the vineyard owner's last hope, the last hope that the vineyard workers will repent and produce the promised fruit. Jesus applies this parable to himself by again referring to Ps 118, making the claim that he is the *κεφαλὴν γωνίας* (12:10; R').

(Note: 16:20 may be viewed as somewhat of a postscript. It would not do great damage, however, to the chiasm to include it as part of the bookend since it is the powerful, ascended beloved Son who works with his disciples.)

Conclusion

The focus of any book of the Bible is Christ. Mark displays this in his gospel in various ways, one of which may be the two-fold chiasm described above. Is such a dual chiasm necessary, even critical, for an understanding of this Gospel? μὴ γένοιτο! What has been offered here is food for thought, another manner in which the emphasis on our Savior might be achieved. Both proposed chiasms revolve around Christ Jesus. God's Kingdom, especially as encapsulated in Christ, is the center of the first chiasm. The Beloved Son Jesus, the chief Cornerstone, anchors the second. Both pertain to the goal of Mark's Gospel: to explain *Who is the Son of God?*

✠ Ἰησοῦ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων ✠

Endnotes

¹ I believe that the certainty of the perceived chiasms would be strongest when they are text-based, that is, when there are obvious markers in the text such as similar vocabulary. At the least, these proposed chiasms present the reader with food for thought.

Appendix A

Mark 1:1-9:12 – The “Kingdom of God”

- A. 1:1-11 Jesus’ baptism / John Baptist / “You are my beloved Son...”
- B. 1:12-13 Temptation of Jesus in wilderness (denies self)
- C. 1:14-20 “Kingdom of God near”; call of disciples to fish for men
- D. 1:21-28 Demons confess Jesus’ identity
- E. 1:29-2:5 Jesus heals Peter’s m-1, many others and paralytic
- F. 2:6-12 Scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy
- G. 2:13-17 Jesus calls as a follower a tax collector and eats with tax collectors and sinners
- H. 2:18-3:6 “Why do you disciples not fast?” / “Bridegroom” with / Lord of the Sabbath / heals shriveled hand of man on Sabbath
- I. 3:7-10 Crowds from all over come to Jesus
- J. 3:11-12 Unclean spirits know who Jesus is
- K. 3:13-19 Jesus appoints the Twelve
- L. 3:20-35 Jesus’ family rejects him as crazy / scribes say he’s in league w/Beelzebub / Jesus defines his true “family”
- M. 4:1-20 Parable of sower and soils
- N. 4:21-25 The necessity of displaying faith / growth in faith
- O. 4:26-29 – **The Kingdom of God** grows without man’s understanding
- O’. 4:30-34 – **The Kingdom of God** is like a mustard seed (looks insignificant but grows)
- N’. 4:35-41 Faith not shown / Jesus reveals his power so faith will grow
- M’. 5:1-43 Three people in whom faith was produced
- L’. 6:1-6 Jesus suffers rejection at Nazareth
- K’. 6:7-13 Jesus sends out the Twelve on a missionary tour
- J’. 6:14-52 Herod does not know who Jesus is / Disciples not understand the feeding of the 5000+ / Disciples have closed minds
- I’. 6:53-56 Crowds come from all over to see Jesus
- H’. 7:1-37 Pharisees/scribes complain that Jesus’ disciples eat w/unclean hands / Jesus NT spin on law / heals daughter of Sam. woman & deaf man
- G’. 8:1-9 Feeding of the 4000 (eats with common people indiscriminately)
- F’. 8:10-21 Pharisees argue with Jesus
- E’. 8:22-25 Jesus heals a blind man
- D’. 8:27-30 Peter confesses Jesus’ identity
- C’. 8:31-33 Jesus predicts suffering, rejection, death, resurrection / rebuke of Peter (not comprehending this was part of his message to spread)
- B’. 8:34-9:1 Jesus stresses necessity of taking up the cross to follow him
- A’. 9:2-13 Transfiguration / “**This is my beloved Son**” / “Elijah”

Appendix B

Mark 9:2-16:20 – “The Beloved Son/Chief Cornerstone”

- A. 9:2-13 “This is my Beloved Son”
- B. 9:14-29 Jesus drives out evil spirit from boy
- C. 9:30 Jesus wants no one to know where he was
- D. 9:31-32 Jesus predicts his betrayal, death, and resurrection
- E. 9:33-41 Disciples discuss who is the greatest / jealousy about their work
- F. 9:42-50 Jesus tells his disciples not to cause anyone or self to stumble in their faith
- G. 10:1-12 Sanctity of marriage
 - H. 10:13 Disciples hinder children from coming to Jesus, betraying his purpose
 - I. 10:14-16 Jesus welcomes children
 - J. 10:17-27 Rich young man comes to Jesus
 - K. 10:28-31 What will Jesus’ followers receive in the world to come?
 - L. 10:32-34 Jesus boldly sets out for Jerusalem to give his all
 - M. 10:35-45 James and John ask for place of honor
 - N. 10:46-11:11 Blind Bartimeus proclaims Jesus as “Son of David” / Palm Sunday crowds acclaim Jesus as Son of David
 - O. 11:12-19 Repent / Cleansing of the temple
 - P. 11:20-26 Living God is powerful God
 - Q. 11:27-33 Jesus has God’s authority (He has all authority to give as he did to John B. also)
- R. 12:1-9 The **Beloved Son** is the one sent by his father
- R’. 12:10-12 The **Beloved Son** is the Chief/Head of the Corner
 - Q. 12:13-17 All things belong to God
 - P. 12:18-27 God is the living God of the resurrection
 - O. 12:28-34 The heart of the law (God is #1)
 - N. 12:35-37 David’s Lord and Son
 - M. 12:38-40 Condemnation of self-glorifying scribes
 - L. 12:41-44 Widow boldly gives all
 - K. 13:1-37 Prediction of the end of the world / assurance for followers
 - J. 14:1-2 Chief priests and scribes plot (most important to them is their power & \$)
 - I. 14:3-9 Mary anoints Jesus (Jesus accepts as act of childlike faith)
 - H. 14:10-11 Judas plots betrayal (wants to hinder anyone from coming to Jesus)
 - G. 14:12-26 Passover / Institution of Lord’s Supper / picture of future marriage feast of the Lamb (Re 19:7-9)
 - F. 14:27-31 Prediction of disciples’ denial
 - E. 14:32-42 Garden of Gethsemane / disciples not stay awake (is this greatness?)
 - D. 14:43-16:8 Jesus’ betrayal, death, and resurrection
 - C. 16:9-16 Jesus appears / gives Great Commission
 - B. 16:17-18 Jesus’ followers perform miraculous signs (including driving out demons)
 - A. 16:19 Ascended Jesus sits at right hand of God the Father (Father accepts him as his **Beloved Son**) (16:20 – postscript)

Understanding Islam and Witnessing to Muslims

David P. Russow

Introduction

While most of Europe was falling into the Dark Ages, the Muslim world was rising to its Golden Age, growing and surging and knocking on Europe's back door. With conquest after conquest the followers of Mohammed took control of the Middle East and North Africa. Then they crossed Spain and climbed the slopes of the Pyrenees looking down on France with eyes on conquering Western Europe.

But a strong, young, long-haired Frank, Charles, son of Pepin, also called Charles Martel or Charles the Hammer, rallied a motley force and met the invading Mohammedans on a plain near Tours. On October 11, 732 A. D. two forces, two cultures, two creeds clashed battling for the fate of the western civilization. The Hammer encouraged his lines to hold fast as the Muslims charged once, then twice, then three times, then four. Charles galloped among the troops standing over the fallen friends and foes, bolstering the bravery, shouting orders, filling the gaps; and the lines held. For five days the attacks came in waves. On the sixth day the Muslim forces broke through the lines only to find themselves surrounded and trapped. Any remaining invaders fled for their lives. Europe was saved for Christianity. Perhaps, too, so was all the West.

But that October 11th of long ago did not snuff the resolve that brought about our more recent September 11th. In response we might well resurrect the spirit of the Hammer, and seek to defend and defeat with cold steel made red with the blood of our enemy. But while homeland security is important and we support the efforts of our nation, we are more acutely aware of our Fatherland secured for us **and for all** on another battleground, Golgotha, and the holy blood shed there. And we remember that Muslims, who remain without the Gospel, are already dead, spiritually and eternally. And

ultimately we remember that in our Fatherland of Heaven, there will be “...*a great multitude...from every nation, tribe, people and language...*” (Revelation 7).

God bless us to see that Muslims are victims of the enemy of us all, the Devil. And God bless us with the Savior’s “gut-wrenching” love [(Ἰησοῦς) Ἰδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους ἐσπλαγχνίσθη περὶ αὐτῶν, Matthew 9:36]. The only way He and we want to see that there are fewer Muslims is that they are added to the ranks of believers in the one and only true Savior, Christ Jesus!

Muslims, too, are part of τὸν κόσμον of John 3:16, and, the πάντα τὰ ἔθνη of Matthew 28:19. So, we need to be equipped, and we in turn need to equip God’s people, to 1) understand Islam, and, to 2) witness to Muslims. “...*Brothers, pray... that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you...*” 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

I. Understanding Islam

The United Nations estimates that after the year 2055 A.D. over half of the world’s population will be Muslim.¹ Fields ripe for the harvest? Examine the plants of the fields.

Summary Facts

Islam means “submission” (Arabic).

1. Islam (Muhammadanism; Mohammedanism) is the only major religion established after Christianity, to which it claims to be superior. It began in Arabia under the leadership of Muhammad. It emphasizes submission to God (Allah). One who submits to God is said to be a Muslim (Moslem). The short creed of Islam is the shahadah: “**There is no deity (god) but God, and Muhammad is his apostle/prophet.**” “Allah” is the Arabic word for God, not a name. Muslims object to being called Muhammadans; to them, Muhammad is the finest example of manhood, but only a man.

2. The sacred book of Islam is the Qur’an (Koran), regarded as God’s “uncreated Speech” revealed to man through Muhammad. The basic guide to Muslim daily life is the Koran. Where it is silent,

the accepted tradition called sunna is used. Where this is silent, the custom (adat) of an Islamic community provides the answer.

3. Main tenets of Islam concern God, Holy Scriptures, angels, prophets, resurrection and final judgment, and predestination, with decisive differences from Christian doctrine. The “five pillars” of Islamic religious practice (required at least once in a lifetime, if possible): shahadah; 5 daily prescribed prayers (salat); annual month of fasting (Ramadan); pilgrimage to sacred places in and near Mecca (hajj); giving alms to poor (legal, zakat; voluntary, sadakat).

4. Islam recognizes 6 great prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Muhammad is said to have thought he would be accepted by Christians and Jews in Arabia because they were also “people of the book.” When he failed to win them, he directed his hostility first against Jews, later against Christians. Within 100 years after Muhammad’s death, Islam spread over Christian areas in North Africa and Spain, and France to claim half of the former Roman Empire. Islam later spread toward the East to India, Malaya and Indonesia, but was halted in the Philippine Islands by the Spanish in the 15th century. Islam entered Europe under leadership of Ottoman Turks, who threatened the Holy Roman Empire at the time of the Lutheran Reformation.

5. The largest of many Muslim sects include Sunnites (of which Hanafites are a subgroup) and Shiites. Others include Wahhabis, Kharijites (Khawarij; from Arabic khariji, “dissenter”; radically puritanical and democratic), and the Ahmadiya movement founded around 1879 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and centered in Western Pakistan. Despite differences, there is an underlying unity and brotherhood in these sects.²

Note, also, the following:

According to Islam, the Arabs trace their ancestry back to Ishmael (Arabic: Ismail), the oldest son of Abraham (Ibrahim). The Bible’s listing of Ishmael’s sons (Genesis 25:12-18) supports this claim, as it includes a number of Arabic names. Already at the time of Jacob and his sons, the Ishmaelites were known as traders. Joseph’s brothers sold him to “a caravan of

Ishmaelites,” who took Joseph to Egypt (Genesis 37:12-36).³

Thus, to many, there is a commonality inherent to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Since all seem to trace their roots to Abraham, the three are perceived as being spiritual cousins. That may be true genetically, but not spiritually nor theologically.

The Cradle of Islam

Pertinent to understanding Islam is understanding the cradle of Islam geographically and temporally. Islam’s birth in geographical context took place in the northern quarter of Arabia that is foreboding, unlike the southern areas which had plenty of rain and were famous in Biblical times for their incense and spices. Overland trade, via caravans, was central to the way of life in the region. This trade would invariably go directly through the city of Mecca. Mecca was strategically located along the trade routes as a stopping place for caravans.

(Mecca) had achieved an economic prominence long before Muhammad came onto the scene in 570 AD. So when we think of the Prophet’s early life, we should not think of it as that of a Bedouin Arab living in a tent and surrounded by vast expanses of empty desert. He was rather born and raised at a commercial crossroads. Where people meet to trade in goods, they also meet to share ideas. There can be no question that the Prophet was exposed to Judaism, and various forms of Christianity, as well as to the superstitious beliefs of his area. ⁴

Two super-powers were colliding in the area when Mohammed came on the scene. In the northwest was the Christian Byzantine Empire, with its capital in Constantinople (Istanbul). To the northeast was the Persian Empire, whose religion of Zoroastrianism spoke of the ongoing battle between good and evil. The two were constantly at war and were weakening each other, unknowingly preparing the way for the armies of Islam eventually to overrun the area.⁵

The *status quo* spiritually for the region was a combination of multiple idol gods and Allah, was referred to as one among many, but was considered as being a remote “high god,” with lesser deities

which would take care of the day to day needs of followers/believers. Not much unlike Joseph Smith and Mormonism, Mohammed made the claim that all other religions were wrong, and called his hearers to solidify around one god.

Added to the local mix it was believed that, between the gods and the world of men, a second strata of spirit beings existed.

- The first—angels—were entirely good creatures.
- The second type—called jinn—could be either good or bad depending on their disposition.
- Third, like all animists, pre-Islamic Arabs cherished a superstitious awe of various stones and places and rocks. Some were connected with tribal tradition.

Such was the case with the Ka’aba. This was said to have been built by Abraham while on a visit to his son Ishmael. Into its southeast corner, father Abraham placed the famous “Black Stone”. Pilgrimages to this shrine were common long before Muhammad integrated them into his religion. ⁶

Finally, the Arabs were divided into many rival tribes and clans, but they were united by a common language. Two main tribes fought for control of Mecca: the *Khuza’a* and the *Kuraish*. The *Kuraish* was further subdivided into the wealthy and dominant *Ummayad* clan and the more humble *Hashimite* clan. It was into the latter that Muhammad was born.

With this backdrop, Muhammad steps on to the stage, “...dead earnest, with a single minded objective to liberate his people from a primitive, savage, self-destructive mode of life.”⁷ And we have to note:

To understand Muhammad and the power of his message we must as usual take the hard uphill road; we must try to live ourselves into his times and his mind, that is, familiarize ourselves with the Arab world on which the Qur’an was imposed. I say “imposed” because, unlike the Christian faith whose founder cautioned his followers to sheath the sword and make disciples by the quiet, peaceable route of teaching, Islam, under the militant leadership of its founder and his warrior followers, won ascendancy over the Arab world by unsheathing the sword.

Muhammad waged unrelenting war on an Arab society sunk in polytheism and fractured by constant feuds among one another that were relieved only in part by visits at the pagan shrine in Mecca to worship, besides over 300 idols, an object of superstitious veneration, probably a meteorite fallen from the skies. Arab society was furthermore dominated by the men; women were inferior, wives were property, and infant girls were regularly buried alive.⁸

The Man: Muhammad (the “Promised One”)

So, in 570 A.D. a woman named Amina bore a son, who according to eastern storytellers, cried out immediately at birth, “There is no god but Allah, and I am his prophet!”⁹

Muhammad was born and grew up in poverty. He never had the benefit of a formal education, and to the end of his life remained unable to read or write. Yet he was intelligent and capable. In his early occupation as a caravan-trader, he acquired a reputation as a trustworthy man. He caught the eye of a wealthy widow, Khadija, for whom he worked. She made an offer of marriage. Muhammad accepted at age twenty-five, she was fifteen years older. They had a daughter, Fatima, who married a man by the name of Ali. Muhammad comes across to the casual observer as a fine, family man, a man of good character, temper and reliability.

In fact, Ehlke wrote:

Muhammad’s marriage to Khadija is significant for several reasons. The way in which it came about tells us something about the prophet. He was a reliable young man and was also known as quiet and thoughtful. That Khadija proposed to Muhammad is evidence of this. Moreover, Muhammad’s marriage to the wealthy Khadija freed him to devote more time to meditation and reflection.¹⁰

During the fifteen years following his marriage to Khadija, Muhammad underwent his religious awakening. While his knowledge of Christianity and Judaism was only second-hand, he was impressed by their monotheism. In the culture of multiple gods, he would have been called a *hanif* (a believer in one god). He especially was intrigued with the Christian emphasis on the last judgment. At the same time, he was becoming increasingly disgusted

with the fornication and drunkenness and idolatrous practices in Mecca. Such immorality, combined with the thought that the last judgment might be close at hand, he began to be troubled and so began his search. He went off into the hills near Mecca to meditate on all these spiritual matters.

The “Night of Power” and Rise to Power

It was while he was meditating that the event occurred which Muslims call “the Night of Power and Excellence.” The angel Jibril appeared to him and said: “Read!” Muhammad responded, “I cannot read.” Upon further call to “Read!” Muhammad asked, “What can I read?” Then the revelation of recitations is said to have begun:

Recite: *In the Name of thy Lord Who created,
Created man out of a blood clot.*

Recite: *And thy Lord is the most bountiful,
Who taught by the pen,
taught man that he knew not. (Sura 96:1-4)*

At first, Muhammad feared he might be losing his mind. He had no great love for the jinn-possessed poets of his town. One tradition has it that he was near to killing himself at one point, before the Angel Jibril prevented him. When he went back to his wife and told her what happened, Khadija received the report positively and so became his first convert. Following this, he became more at ease with the continuing heavenly revelations. ¹¹

Muhammed’s visions and revelations received mixed reaction. His emphasis on the day of judgment piqued interest, but his prohibition against the lucrative idolatry turned angry hearts against him. This was particularly true of the wealthy Ummayyads. Revelations are well and good until they cost. There was little conversion, but great was the opposition.

Allah showed Muhammad the way to make inroads by getting the townspeople of Yathrib (later Medina) to invite Muhammad north to settle their tribal differences for them. Muhammad gladly

accepted their invitation, and migrated there along with his followers in 622 AD. This event is called the *Hi-jira*. It was at Medina that Muhammad was able to establish basic Islamic religious practice, such as gathering at the mosque on Fridays, and daily prayers. Alms taking for the poor also became established at this time. Muhammad then was able to return to Mecca in 630 AD with power and prestige. He then proceeded to purge the Ka'aba of its idols, smashing every one of them himself. He died shortly thereafter. Tradition has it that at one of his last great sermons in Mecca he said, "Know ye that every Muslim is brother to every other Muslim."¹²

Mecca proved the focal point for the movement. Muhammad continued to have a deep resentment toward the people of Mecca and used his position of power in Medina to raid the trade caravans heading to and from Mecca. Finally in 630, Muhammad led a force of 10,000 in taking control of Mecca.

Once Muhammad had destroyed the idols of the Ka'aba, the pagan shrine of the Arabs, he retained the Black Stone as the most sacred relic of Islam and established the renewed Ka'aba as the center of Islamic worship.

With the destruction of the idols Muhammad destroyed the symbol of wealth and power of pagan Arabia. He established Islam as the sole religion of Mecca and himself as its only prophet. By the following year, 631, Islam had spread throughout Arabia and Muhammad was its undisputed leader.

By the time of his death in 632, Muhammad had seen the proclamation of his message spread from his immediate family through all the Arabian peninsula. Pagan idols had been destroyed and replaced with a belief in a single God. A land that had been torn by intertribal warfare was united by ties that made every Arab a brother in submission to the one God and His prophet Muhammad. Muhammad has rightly been judged the most influential Arab, and second to Jesus Christ as the most influential person in the history of the world.¹³

One last thing about Muhammad. Most cults (i.e. non-Trinitarian, extra-biblical, non-Christian sects) are drawn into existence, grow and flourish because of the magnetism and charisma of a man. Anis A. Shorrosh, in *Islam Revealed: A Christian Arab*

View of Islam, describes the man this way:

Muhammad was somewhat above middle height, with a lean but commanding figure. His head was massive, with a broad and noble forehead. He had thick black hair, slightly curling, which hung over his ears; his eyes were large black and piercing; his eyebrows arched and joined, his nose high and aquiline; and he had a long bushy beard. When he was excited, his veins would swell across his forehead. His eyes were often bloodshot and always restless. Decisions marked his every movement. He used to walk so rapidly that his followers half-ran behind him and could hardly keep up with him. (Shorrosh, 50)¹⁴

The Qur'an

While the Bible is held up to scrutiny and questions among the historical-critical brand of Christians, among the 800 million Muslims scattered around the world, all of them embrace an absolute allegiance to the Qur'an as being the true word for word revelation of the will of their god. And Muslims believe that only Muhammad could bring this revelation to the earth, not an angel, not a superhuman being, but a man like any other. Only he, they believe, could translate the guidance of these revelations, into action, to live it.

When Muhammad was forty, about the year 610, he claimed to have the beginning of these revelations, which were:

...etched on his memory, word for word, syllable for syllable, and letter for letter, through the mediation of the angel Gabriel and aimed squarely at putting an end to the ruinous state of paganism and immoral life among the Arabs while at the same time sparing them from the horrendous factionalism among Jews and Christians. In their disorganized form and their repetitious quality, I find these revelations to be precisely what one might expect would tumble from a mind possessed with passionate zeal for reform. It would stamp out polytheism in favor of submission to a single God. It would freeze its message to its Arabic language, the language inseparable from the message. It would instill into the people a morality of a higher order. It would turn the stock of familiar stories in the Christian Bible away from offering grist for endless quarreling into simple

lessons and warnings about correct behavior.¹⁵

The term “Qur’an” literally means “recitations,” or “readings.” Each chapter of the Qur’an is termed “surah,” literally, “series.” Muhammad is to have received the surahs from the archangel Gabriel over a span of two decades.

The arrangement of the surahs does not follow a historical pattern. In fact, it does not seem to follow any consistent chronological or topical pattern. The surahs of the Qur’an are arranged according to length in descending order: The longest comes first and the shortest last, with the exception of the “Fatihah” (the opener) which is placed at the very beginning of the Qur’an. Surahs vary in length from 287 verses to 3. The longest surahs, which come first, relate to a period of Muhammad’s role as head of the community in Medina. The shorter ones containing mostly his doctrinal teachings, came during the time Muhammad was prophesying in Mecca; yet in the order followed by the Quran, they are found mostly in the later part.

Any similarities with the Bible should be understood in this light:

A Jew or Christian familiar with the contents of the Bible would be struck by the Quran’s dependence on it. With the exception of a few narratives purely Arabian in origin, all Quranic stories have their Biblical parallel. The many discrepancies between the Biblical and Quranic accounts indicate that Muhammad was less concerned with the details of the event and more concerned with the moral underlying them. He cited such narratives not to preserve them in the Qur’an for their own sake, but rather to support a point he wished to emphasize.¹⁶

While there might be apparent similarities the contradictions of the Bible in the Qur’an are glaring. Here’s one clear example:

The Bible (Genesis 37)

Joseph went to look for his brothers
They plotted after Joseph arrived
They put Joseph in a dry well
Joseph was sold for a considerable price

The Qur’an (Joseph, Sura 12)

The brothers persuaded their father and took Joseph with them
They planned it beforehand
They put Joseph in a well containing water
Joseph was sold for a little

Before we compare the “theology” contained in the Qur’an, let’s let it speak for itself. What is the flavor, import, message of the following?

Muhammad is told:

Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate. 9:73.

Again:

When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly. Then grant them their freedom or take ransom from them, until War shall lay down her burdens. 47:4

Again:

When the sacred months are over slay the idolators wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. 9:5

Again:

The believers who stay at home... are not equal to those who fight for the cause of God with their goods and their persons. God has given those that fight with their goods and their persons a higher rank than those who stay at home. 4:95

What seems endemic to the Qur’an are out of place, incoherent, and ambiguous. It does not agree with itself or where it is supposed to dovetail with the Bible. For example:

We have revealed Our will to you as We revealed it to Noah and to the prophets who came after him: as We revealed it to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, and David God bears witness, by that which He has revealed to you, that He revealed it with His knowledge; and so do the angels. There is no better witness than God. 4:163-166

Or how about:

And there were gathered together unto Solomon armies of jinn and humankind, and of the birds, and they were set in battle order; Till when they reached the Valley of the Ants, an ant exclaimed: O ants! Enter your dwelling lest Solomon and his armies crush you, unperceiving. And Solomon smiled, laughing at her speech...27:17-19

Again:

This Koran could not have been devised by any but God. It confirms what was revealed before it, and fully explains the Scriptures. It is beyond doubt from the Lord of the Universe. If they say, "He invented it himself," say: "Bring me one chapter like it." 10:38, 39

Again:

It is He who has revealed to you the Book. Some of its verses are precise in meaning ...and others are ambiguous. Those whose hearts are infected with disbelief follow the ambiguous part, so as to create dissension by seeking to explain it. But no one knows its meaning except God. 3:7

The Jews say Ezra is the son of God, while the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. Such are their assertions, by which they imitate the infidels of old. God confound them! How perverse they are! 9:30

We created man from dry clay, from black molded loam, and before him Satan from smokeless fire. Your Lord said to the angels: "I am creating man from dry clay When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him, kneel down and prostrate yourselves before him. The angels, one and all, prostrated themselves, except Satan "Satan," said God, "why do you not prostrate yourself?" He replied: "I will not bow down to a mortal whom You created of dry clay." ... "Be gone," said God, "you are accursed. My curse shall be on you till Judgment-day." 15:26-35

"Who is the Lord of the Universe?" asked Pharaoh. (Moses) replied: "He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth ...

If only you had faith.” ... “If you serve any other god but myself,” replied Pharaoh, “I shall have you thrown into prison.” “Even if I have showed you a convincing sign?” said Moses.

He replied, “Show us your sign, if what you say be true.” Moses threw down his staff and thereupon it changed to a veritable serpent. Then he drew out his hand, and it was white to all who saw it. “This man,” he said to his nobles, “is a skillful sorcerer What is your counsel?” They replied, “Put them off awhile, him and his brother, and ...summon every skillful sorcerer to your presence” And when the sorcerers came to Pharaoh, they said: “Shall we be rewarded if we win?” “Yes,” he answered, “and you shall become my favored friends.” Moses said to them: “Throw down all that you wish to throw.” They cast down their ropes and staffs, saying, “By Pharaoh’s glory, we shall surely win.” Then Moses threw down his staff, and it swallowed their false devices. The sorcerers prostrated themselves in adoration, saying, ‘We now believe in the Lord of the Universe, the Lord of Moses and Aaron.’” 26:23-48

And when Moses came at the appointed time..., he said: “Lord, reveal Yourself to me, that I may look upon you.” He replied, “You shall not see Me. But look upon the Mountain; if it remains firm upon its base, then only shall you see Me.” And when his Lord revealed Himself to the Mountain, He leveled it into dust. Moses fell down senseless, and, when he came to, said: “Glory be to You! Accept my repentance. I am the first of believers.” 7:143

Any contradictions or slip ups in the Qur’an seem to be covered by the statement:

If we abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We will replace it by a better one or one similar. Did you not know that God has power over all things? 2:106¹⁷

Finally, all error unseats the true God, the Triune God, from His rightful position as God, and vitiates the Gospel of salvation which

is only in and through Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior. Again, the Qur'an speaks for itself:

God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him. 112:1f.

He is the creator of the heavens and the earth. How should he have a son when he had no consort? 6:102

(Concerning Gabriel's visit to Mary):

"I am the messenger of your Lord," he replied, "and have come to give you a holy son." "How shall I bear a child," she answered, "when I am a virgin, untouched by man?" "Such is the will of your Lord," he replied. "That is no difficult thing for him."

Thereupon she conceived him, and retired to a far-off place. And when she felt the throes of childbirth she lay down by the trunk of a palm tree, crying, "Oh, would that I had died and passed into oblivion!" But a voice from below cried out to her: "Do not despair. Your Lord has provided a brook that runs at your feet, and if you shake the trunk of this palm-tree it will drop fresh ripe dates in your lap...."

Carrying her child, she came to her people, who said to her: "Mary, this is indeed a strange thing! ... Your father was never a whore-monger, nor was your mother a harlot." She made a sign to them, pointing to the child. But they replied: "How can we speak with a babe in the cradle?" Whereupon he spoke and said: "I am the servant of God I was blessed on the day I was born, and blessed I shall be on the day of my death." ...

Such was Jesus, the son of Mary. That is the whole truth, which they still doubt. God forbid that He Himself should beget a son! When he decrees a thing He need only say: "Be," and it is. 19:19-35

Then God will say: "Jesus, son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: 'Worship me and my mother as gods besides God?'" "Glory to you," he will answer, "how could I ever say that to which I have no right?" 5:116

(Concerning Jesus' death):

They denied the truth and uttered a monstrous falsehood against Mary. They declared: "We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of God." They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did They did not slay him for certain. God lifted him up to Him(self); God is mighty and wise. 4:156-158

(Concerning the Trinity):

People of the book, do not transgress the bounds of your religion. Speak nothing but the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was no more than God's apostle So believe in God and His apostles and do not say: "Three." ... God is but one God. God forbid that He should have a son. 4:171¹⁸

And, ultimately, while Islam claims to be, "the fulfillment of Christianity, a religion that had the prophet Jesus but which was corrupted by people who call themselves Christians,"¹⁹ she contradicts Christ and Christianity. Consider this comparison:

Muhammad

Born in a normal way
 Performed no miracles
 Led followers into war many times
 A sinner needing to repent
 Died and was buried

Jesus

Miraculous virgin birth
 Performed many miracles
 Did not fight
 Without sin
 Died, was buried, but rose again

The Theology of Islam

Comparative theology leads us to Islamic theology. In teaching the First Commandment, Martin Luther said, "From this flows all others." Tis true, but tis Law. And the Law cannot save. Bottom line, Islam is law based, *sacrificium* oriented. No need for a Savior, just conformity. No sin that can't be countered with conforming. The only unforgivable sin to the Muslim is to deny the

following confession (from which flow all others): “*La ilaha illa ‘l-Lah wa Muhammadan rasul al-Lah*” (There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God).

This Shahadah (open testimony) expresses their belief in a monotheistic god who has been revealed to the world through His messengers of whom Muhammad is the last. This profession of faith serves as the cornerstone of Islamic theology. From it, all of the other doctrines follow.

In the paper, *Reaching Muslims with the Gospel*, one finds the following summary:

Since Islam rejects the Old and New Testament in favor of the Quran, it is not surprising that many of its teachings are contrary to Scripture. To begin with, Islam denies that man is sinful by nature. In *Reaching Muslims for Christ* William Saal explains Islam’s teaching on sin: “We were created weak. Our tendency to sin results from an act of God. There is no sin nature. Although this sin is serious, it is not insurmountable.”²⁰ Like the common cold, sin is only a weakness. With enough effort man can overcome this weakness and attain everlasting life.²¹

As further reference concerning the theology of Islam I am including the following from Schmeling (see endnote 13):

Man

The Quran teaches that man was created from clay and enjoys a very high-ranking status among God’s creatures. (Quran 2:30-34) Man alone has been given a rational mind and spiritual hopes. Man has been chosen by God to be His agent on earth. As such, man is regarded as a “dignified being, potentially capable of good and noble achievements.” (Quran 6:165; 7:11; 17:70-72, 90-95)

Islam contends that every person is born spiritually neutral. He has neither inherited sin nor inherited value. It teaches an age of accountability from which time man is responsible for his actions. Man has complete freedom of the will: free to commit sin and free to do good. (Quran 82:6-8; 41:46; 45:15; 53:32-42)

Man is to submit to the will of God and fulfill the purpose for which God placed him into the world. This special position in the world leads the Muslim to place great faith in the potentiality of good among human beings. This potential for good and the

faith in the mercy of God serves as the basis for their faith in the salvation of the majority of mankind.

Sin, Repentance, and, Salvation

As mentioned previously, Muslims do not believe in original sin. They believe that at the time of Adam's first sin God forgave Adam, thereby negating the effect of Adam's sin upon his descendants and the need for someone else to atone for his sin. (Quran 2:35-37; 20:117-122) Muslims reject the atoning sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross as being contrary to God's justice and mercy as well as being contrary to rational thought. All responsibility for man's salvation is placed upon man through the guidance of God. Man's actions during his life serve as a manifestation of his faith. A record of his actions is kept by the angels and the jinn who give a report to God on the Day of Judgment. This report evaluated by a merciful God determines whether a person will enter heaven or hell. Each person is completely responsible for his personal salvation thereby excluding any intercessory acts by one on behalf of another. (Quran 10:9-10; 18:28-30; 103:1-3)

Islam teaches that God does not hold any person responsible until he has been shown the Right Way. A person who has never been exposed to Islam is, therefore, not held responsible for not acting according to God's will. Such a person is only responsible for doing what his logic and conscience directed. Muslims who fail to spread the message of Islam will be held responsible for the ignorance and destruction of those who are ill-informed or uninformed (Quran 3:100-112; 16:102-125) Thus, every Muslim is expected to spread the message of Islam through every available means.

Eschatology

The doctrines of the Last Judgment can be regarded as the second great doctrine of Islam—following the teachings regarding God. Islam teaches that on the Last Day the world will come to an end, the dead will be resurrected and a judgment will be pronounced on every person in accordance with his deeds. Those with good records will be assigned to heaven and those with bad records will be punished and cast into hell. (Quran 82:19; 20:100-112; 69:13-18)

The result of the judgment is either everlasting heaven or everlasting hell. There is no intermediate condition. Heaven is described as "a Garden" or "Paradise" in which the blessed enjoy luxuries of many kinds, above all of which is the vision of God. (Quran 76:12-22) Jahannam (gehenna or Hell) is a place

where the pains of body and soul are united. The torments of hell are depicted with great imagery which is borrowed from both Biblical and Arabian references. (Quran 78:23-30; 10:27-38)

The Day of Judgment provides a final day of retribution for the virtuous and for those who indulged in immoral activities. Those who have been obedient to the Right Way, but have suffered as a result, will receive their final reward in everlasting bliss. Those who benefited as a result of their wickedness or have rejected Islam will receive their final recompense in everlasting hell. In the end, the justice of God will prevail. (Quran 18:50; 42:22)

Five Pillars of Faith

The “Five Pillars of Faith” take the Muslim from the theoretical aspects of Quranic doctrine and move him to the exercise of his faith in his life. Some of these ceremonial obligations require daily activity; others weekly, monthly, annual; and one at a minimum once in a lifetime. They include the Shahadah (open testimony), Salah (prayer ritual), Sawm (fasting), Zakah (alms-giving), and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

The Shahadah is the most repeated act of faith of the Muslim. The mere recitation of the phrase “I bear witness that there is no god but God, and that Muhammad is the messenger of God” makes a person a Muslim. They are the first words whispered into the ears of a baby and the last spoken by the dying. The average Muslim repeats the phrase at least twenty times a day. Muhammad placed greater importance upon prayer than on any other religious duty. Salah, therefore, becomes an essential obligation of Muslim worship. Salah resembles public worship in that it contains the recitation of portions of the Quran, confession of faith, benediction, and of brief praises. The act of prayer is to be observed five times a day at dawn, midday, midafternoon, sunset, and nightfall. Although Islam has no clergy, the form and manner of the prayers are exactly prescribed and followed by the faithful Muslim.

The Sawm, or fast, is prescribed by the Quran so that the Muslim might “derive good from it.” (Quran 2:179-183). The Muslims follow a lunar calendar which may move the month of fasting—Ramadan—throughout the solar year. The Muslim is required to avoid eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual intercourse from sunrise until sunset each day during that month. The month of fasting is concluded with a great celebration on the first day of the following month.

The Zakah, or alms-giving, was originally an act of piety and love in which the faithful Muslim wanted to give back to God

a portion of His blessings by aiding the poor. Later it became an obligatory tax in which two to three percent of the Muslim's income is now required to support the needy and the elderly. The Quran specifies the collection and the distribution of the Zakah. (Quran 24:56; 57:18; 9:60)

The fifth pillar of faith is the pilgrimage, or Hajj, to the sacred monuments of Mecca. It is to be taken at least once in a lifetime by those who are physically able or can afford it. The principal points of interest of the pilgrimage are the well of Zamzam—traditionally the source of water provided by God for Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:17-20)—and the Kabah—House of God legendarily rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael on the spot originally built by Adam before the Flood. The Kabah contains the sacred Black Stone which is the only existing remnant of the altar upon which Abraham was to sacrifice Ishmael. Each year hundreds of thousands of Muslims from all over the world converge upon Mecca in accordance with the directives of the Quran (Quran 3:90-92). (For a more complete description of the Hajj, see National Geographic, November, 1978.)

Concerning the theology of the Qur'an and Islam and the Holy Scriptures and Christianity, here's a brief, bottom line comparison:

Unbelievers are those that say: "God is one of three." There is but one God. 5:73

If you avoid the enormities (wicked acts) you are forbidden, We shall pardon your misdeeds and usher you in with all honor. 4:30

If anyone attacks you, attack him as he attacked you. Have fear of God, and know that God is with the righteous. 2:194

He that obeys God and His apostle shall dwell forever in gardens watered by running streams. That is the supreme triumph. But he that disobeys God and His apostle and transgresses His bounds, shall be cast into a Fire where he shall abide forever. 4:13

Hear, O Israel: the Lord, our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. Dt. 6:4, 5

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 Jn. 1:9

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Mt. 5:44, 45

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes on him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jn. 3:16

II. Witnessing to Muslims

In our attempt to understand Islam – and, mind you, it is merely an attempt – does it seem as if there are too many obstacles to overcome. I was tempted to advise you to do as one British General did during the island hopping in the Pacific towards the end of World War II. Under an order, “Take no prisoners,” because they were moving so fast, that General ordered his troops to keep the captured enemy until he could be on site. He lined them up, took a bucket of water, marched down the line and baptized them. Then he had them shot. (My father told us that story in Confirmation Instruction to illustrate valid vs. invalid Baptism).

Capture, baptize, shoot isn't the way. But will the **4 P's** or **God's Great Exchange** work with the Muslim when he/she believes that:

- The very worst thing anyone can do is to deny Allah and worship someone or something else.
- That believers in the Trinity are idolaters worthy of hatred.
- That the Qur'an is the word of god and that the Bible is corrupted by Christians (and to show respect for it, it is always placed on the top shelf, is never under another book, is only handled after washing first...)
- That Jesus is only a prophet, but Muhammad is the greatest.
- That Muhammad, not Jesus, is our chief intercessor (especially on Judgment Day)
- That law is gospel, and god's mercy is a matter of arithmetic

And each soul is paid in full for what it did. And he is best aware of what they do. 39:70

Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope. For it is only that which it hath earned, and against it only that which it hath deserved. Surah II 286

- *Every soul will taste of death. And ye will be paid on the day of resurrection only that which ye have fairly earned. Whoso is removed from the fire and is made to enter paradise is indeed triumphant. The life of this world is but comfort of*

illusion. 3:185

Read thy book. Thy soul sufficeth as reckonor against this day. 17:14

When the two Receivers receive (him), seated on the right hand and on the left, he uttereth no word but there is with him an observer ready. 50:17-18

- **THERE IS NO GOD BUT ALLAH AND MOHAMMAD IS HIS PROPHET.**

(Gleaned from, *Islam*, Joe Johnson, St. Croix Pastor's Conference, at Hope Lutheran Church, Andover, MN, WELS, February 11, 2003)

The task seems improbable. The walls seem impenetrable. The obstacles seem insurmountable. It is then that we need to ask ourselves as the LORD asked Abraham when Sarah laughed, "*Is anything too hard for the LORD?*" (Genesis 18:14); or, what the LORD asked Moses when he couldn't see how so many could be fed, "*Is the LORD's arm too short?*" (Numbers 11:23); or, what the angel told Mary when she wondered how it could be that a virgin could/would be with child, "*For nothing is impossible with God.*" (Luke 1:37).

The means aren't ours the means are the Lord's, and He will do it. It is through these means that God has promised that the Holy Spirit will work and preserve faith.

That is the clear teaching of the Scriptures and the Confessions. The Smalcald Articles state, "in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word" (Smalcald Articles Part III, Art. VIII, 3). The Augsburg Confession states, "They (our churches) condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external word through their own preparations and works." (A.C. Art. V, 2). Mueller's *Christian Dogmatics* quotes the Latin definition of the means of grace:

Our dogmaticians define the means of grace as "*media externa a Deo ordinata, quibus Deus gratiam a Christo acquisitam hominibus offert et fidem ad gratiam accipiendam necessariam*

in hominibus efficit et conservat.” As divinely ordained means of grace they acknowledge, on the basis of Scripture, only the Word (the Gospel) and the Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the latter two as the visible Word (*verbum visibile*).²²

These means have a twofold function or power. The Holy Spirit through these means offers the grace of God and the righteousness of Jesus to those who hear and/or read the Word. Also through the means of grace the Holy Spirit actually works to create, strengthen and preserve faith in the pure gift of forgiveness by Christ Jesus so that hearts are turned and converted. Mueller writes, “For this reason we rightly call the means of grace *media communicationis remissionis peccatorum sive iustificationis ex parte Dei*.”²³ The Gospel is a means of grace not only because it offers forgiveness but also because the Gospel actually delivers forgiveness and absolves the sinner.

Professor and missionary Ernst H. Wendland writing in *Missiological Perspectives* under the topic, *The Means of Grace* writes:

Very few missiological treatises, if any at all, have very much to say about the Means of Grace. George Peters, for example, scarcely mentions this subject in his otherwise exhaustive treatment, other than to quote Robert D. Culver’s exegesis of Matthew 28:19, where Culver refers to “baptize” as “a controversial word,” which he prefers “to define no further on this occasion.” Robert Culver ignores the subject as well. David Hesselgrave has a brief section on baptism as an act of symbolic confession. He adds the comment: “there is a danger in regard to the doctrine of baptism which saves (I Peter 3:21) and the water baptism which is only symbolic” (*Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, p. 257).²⁴

Wendland also stresses that,

The whole use of the Means of Grace has become such a *modus operandi* in our Lutheran church that we are inclined to take it for granted. We sometimes wonder if we appreciate our emphasis upon the use of the Means of Grace, and what an important role they play in our entire approach to building up and edifying the body of Christ. To us they are the marks of

the Church. They are the visible signs and tokens of grace, the means through which God offers and assures his grace to man (cf. A.C., Article XIII; Apol. Art. XII and Art. XIII).²⁵

Truly, our Lutheran Church has objective instruments which others may fail to recognize, but which to us are of fundamental importance for preserving and extending the faith.²⁶

In *The True Mission Of The Church* Professor Carl Lawrenz writes the following under the heading *The Church and Salvation*.

The church is the spiritual body of all those whom the Holy Spirit through the gospel has brought to faith in Christ as their Savior. The marks by which the presence of the church is recognized are the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacraments. In a wider sense the designation of the church is therefore applied to those who profess Christian faith by being gathered about the gospel in Word and holy sacraments.

The only task or mission specifically entrusted to the church is proclaiming the gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, to men for their salvation. To the unregenerate the church is to proclaim the gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, in order to make disciples of them, i.e., that through its testimony the Holy Spirit may bring more and more sinners to saving faith in Christ (mission work). To those who have already come to faith, the church is to continue to proclaim the gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, that they may be built up in Christian faith, joy, comfort, understanding, hope and a sanctified life (Christian education).²⁷

The means with which the church is to carry out its one entrusted task, or mission, of bringing sinners to salvation for time and eternity is the gospel, and together with it the entire Word of God, the Scriptures. In proclaiming any part of God's Word to men the church is to keep it in close relation to the central message of pardon and salvation in Christ. Only in this way will the testimony of the church remain a part of the task or mission specifically assigned to it.

The gospel message is offered in the Word of God, which is the power of God unto salvation. The sacraments are the same gospel message with a seal attached to it (**the visible Word**). Forgiveness of sins is also the fundamental gift of the sacraments. All other blessings also of the Lord's Supper are transmitted in and through this fundamental gift of forgiveness apprehended in faith and sealed by the real presence.²⁸

Luther in his *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525) said:

He (God) could, of course, do this apart from the Word; but He does not want to do it in that way. And who are we to inquire in the reason for the divine will? It is enough for us to know that God so wills it; and it becomes us to reverence, love, and adore this will and to bridle the impertinence of our reason.

“Sin and grace, Law and Gospel—the heart of our proclamation, the motivating force behind all our missionary activity! Because of sin the need of all people is desperate. But because of Christ the sin of all mankind has been atoned, the debt paid in full. In boundless mercy God has declared his verdict of righteousness to all sinners. This is the very heart of the message of our Christian ministry. Sin—redemption—justification. These truths go together. Upon these objective truths of Scripture the entire work of the church of Jesus Christ stands or falls.²⁹

To proclaim this gospel in all its fullness and in all its power is not only our heritage. It is our distinct privilege. It is a unique privilege. A Lutheran missionary in some far-off world mission field is going to find himself at times surrounded by all sorts of other sects and denominations. Sometimes he is going to wonder if his methods are as effective, or his tools as powerful, particularly if others seem to be enjoying more outward success. Is he perhaps wasting his time—and other people’s money? Does he have *Existenzberechtigung*, a right of existence? At times he needs to remind himself of that crown which God himself has placed upon his head, and with the trembling fingers of humility and appreciation touch that crown again. The unconditioned gospel of Christ! There is nothing to equal it.³⁰

And what about being “confessional” as we apply the Means of Grace? Werner Stoehr in an article entitled, “Teach Them To Obey Everything That I Have Commanded” wrote:

“Permit me to say a few words first about the basic principles of a confession. The roots of confessional faithfulness in doctrine and practice lie in the understanding of what a confession is. To confess something means that a person takes a stance of wholehearted conviction toward the content of the confession and also bears public witness to his conviction. ...Wherever and whenever God’s Word is proclaimed, this proclamation becomes confession. A true Christian confession is always equivalent to what the Holy Scriptures say, since they are the fundamental norm and source of the confession. When people

depart from the content of biblical statements, as the sects have done again and again in the course of church history, the Holy Spirit has always given his true church the gift of clear doctrinal definitions. We see the gift of the Spirit in the formulation of confessions during the early Christian centuries and again in the Reformation period. The fathers struggled to find unequivocal expression, drawn from the Word of God, which would not be subject to misunderstanding. The unequivocal nature of the expression—excludes contrary opinions, i.e., condemns them. The exclusion of error takes place through language that is not subject to misunderstanding or, if that is not sufficient, through added condemnations.”³¹

Kurt Marquardt adds:

The fact is that there simply is no neutral, undogmatic, generic Gospel, which may then be flavored to taste with denominational additives, say a dash of delicate Anglican mint sauce here, and hearty Lutheran sauerkraut or Baptist okra there. Every confession of the Gospel is at once and inevitably dogmatic or “denominational.” For no honest presentation of the Gospel can escape the necessity of saying yes or no to basic evangelical ingredients like the power of Baptism, grace alone, universal grace, the Gospel as means of grace or the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Holy Supper for our salvation.³²

Nothing new or unique in methodology with special Muslim missiological impact, is there, brothers? And, yet, how new every morning is His faithfulness, and unique His ways in contacting, building bridges, and witnessing effectively to a Muslim. Yet, remember, what Paul wrote:

“¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings,” 1 Corinthians 9.

We must approach the Muslim by building a Muslim bridge, that is, by avoiding those things that will cause any further stumbling block to Gospel witness, and doing (saying) those things that will lessen Satan's trickery to prevent Gospel witness. We cannot work faith. Praise the Spirit that is up to Him. Ours is to go with the means, according to knowledge. Another way of putting it is, "...*speak the truth in love,*" Ephesians 4:15. In his book entitled *Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims*, Ehlke writes: "Muslims, like all of us, need to hear both the Law and the Gospel. Without the Law, we do not see how sinful we are and how much we need a Savior. Without the Gospel, we are left in the hopeless condition of pleasing the holy God with flawed and utterly insufficient human efforts."³³

Ehlke goes on to point out that Muslims do have some knowledge of Jesus, not saving, but some, and that might be the bridge.

Two small points may help a Muslim to believe Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus lived a fully human life; so it was natural for Him to go through the human experience of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). Secondly, according to the Qur'an, Jesus raised the dead; so, it should not be difficult for Muslims to believe that he Himself could rise from the dead, especially since the Bible so clearly states that he has risen from the dead. (Henry Martyn Institute 67)³⁴

Ehlke has collected a top ten list of do's and don'ts to keep in mind when witnessing to the Muslim. He credits an anonymous book entitled *Christian Witness among Muslims*.

- 1) Do know what the Bible teaches. Being well grounded in the faith is essential.
- 2) Do respect Muslims as people for whom Jesus died. The Bible says that, "... *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation,*" 2 Corinthians 5:19. The world includes everyone, and that reconciliation becomes each person's personal possession when he or she comes into a relationship of faith in Christ.
- 3) Do show sincere respect and friendship to Muslims.
- 4) Do listen to their real needs. Ask questions.
- 5) Do focus the conversation on Jesus Christ. Use the Word

of God.

6) Do give literature about Jesus and the Bible.

7) Do invite a Muslim friend to a church service or to some function at church.

8) Do become well informed about Islam. This is introductory. There is so much to learn. Books about missionaries to Muslims or Muslim converts to Christ are especially inspiring.

9) Do be available. We may not appreciate what a tremendous step it is for Muslims to convert. Even in North America, they face ostracism from their families and, especially in the case of Muslims from the Middle East, they live with the fear of physical reprisal and even death.

10) Do pray that Muslim hearts may be softened for the Gospel. “Whatever good may be done is done and brought about by prayer,” wrote Luther, “which is the omnipotent empress. In human affairs we accomplish everything through prayer” (*What Luther Says*, 2:1094).

1) Don’t treat the Qur’an disrespectfully. It is one thing to disagree with the teachings of Islam, another to ridicule them.

2) Don’t treat the Bible disrespectfully, by placing it on the floor, for example. Above all, don’t undermine the Bible by ungodly living. It goes without saying that being a Christian means living by the Word as well as talking about it.

3) Don’t get into a battle of the books – the Qur’an vs. the Bible. It is important for Christians to understand the issues involved and to appreciate the reliability of the Bible. With that knowledge, let the Bible speak for itself. The straightforward assertions of the Bible are powerful, and through them the Holy Spirit works.

4) Don’t make assumptions about what the Muslim believes. Ask him or her. In teaching the World of Islam course, it has been my experience that Muslims often are not that well informed about their own faith. On occasion, I have met people who claimed to be both Muslim and Christian at the same time.

5) Don’t attack the name Allah as a false god. This is a touchy issue, since many Arabic speaking Christians use the name Allah to refer to the God of the Bible. At the same time, an authority such as Robert Morey points out that the very name Allah is related to the pagan moon god of pre-Islamic Arabia.

6) Don’t attack Islam, Muhammad, or the Qur’an. Duncan writes, “Few people have ever been debated into the kingdom. Light candles instead of cursing the darkness.” Depending on their relationship to Islam, some Muslims may themselves be critical of the faith and ready to hear the other side.

7) Don't be insulting. It would be foolish to invite a practicing Muslim over for a pork dinner and wine. Other less obvious customs can be learned and watched. One is the practice of never holding the Qur'an below one's waist, because it would be insulting to do that. And since Muslims consider dogs to be unclean animals, keep your dog outside if a Muslim friend visits.

8) Don't witness alone to a person of the opposite sex.

9) Don't give up. St. Augustine's mother Monica prayed and witnessed for over a dozen years before her son became a Christian, and he became one of the greatest theologians of all time. (Luther was an Augustinian monk and learned much from him).

10) Don't be afraid. It can be intimidating to share our faith – both for us and the other person(s) involved. Paul writes, *“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline,”* 2 Timothy 1:7. Because of what Christ has done for us, we are confident God loves us, our salvation is certain, and Jesus is with us as we reflect his love and share it with others.³⁵

We, in America, may be poised advantageously for the Gospel with Muslims. Many American Muslims believe that they are a religion of peace and are turned off by terrorist actions. “The biggest single motivation (for Muslims who become Christians) was ‘dissatisfaction with Islam.’”³⁶ Maybe other issues, like the roles of women in Islam, or the legalism, may be opportunities to fill a dissatisfied heart.

Persistence and patience. “Missionary Pieter Reid said that in Indonesia it often takes 3-5 years of being a Christian friend before one is given the opportunity to share the Word with a Muslim.”³⁷ Study the culture. Learn the habits. Love according to knowledge, (e.g. a Christian woman needs to look and dress modestly with a Muslim woman). Speak the Word.

Islam is a world in transition around the globe and in our country. Muslims are not one people and Islam is not one religion. The rapid political, social, and economic changes are bringing reevaluations of Islam and its application to the lives of Muslim laity. Even after 9-11, more and more Muslims are living in our back yards. Muslim businessmen and students increasingly are here to learn; why not the Gospel, too?

Conclusion

See the Muslim mass out our door and the world around. *“Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”* The mission is clear. The means are sure. We have our plains too, and (Jesus) “...is by our side upon the plain with His good gifts and Spirit.” So equipped, we will take our stand and slay them with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and they will live.

Endnotes

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