

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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of John 17 with Special Reference
to Luther’s Works: Volume 69**

**Intersections of Doctrine: An
Exegesis of Ephesians 2:1–10**

Basic Rules for Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching

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Trees and Chaff

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LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 60, Nos. 2–3 (June–September 2020)

THE FIRST THING TO COME TO ONE'S MIND when considering John 17 is likely the great comfort that Jesus prays for His people. Sometimes lost in a consideration of this chapter, however, are the many doctrinal truths Jesus spoke in this prayer. Here, Jesus offers us great comfort in knowing that He intercedes for us, and He reminds us of a number of the teachings we study in dogmatics. In the essay, “Your Word is Truth’: An Exegetical Study of John 17 with Special Reference to *Luther’s Works: Volume 69*,” the Rev. David Locklair points to this comfort and the many doctrines expressed in Christ’s high priestly prayer. Pastor Locklair is the pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Portage, Indiana.

The essay, “Intersections of Doctrine: An Exegesis of Ephesians 2:1–10,” by Prof. Nicholas Proksch, was presented originally at the Great Lakes Pastoral Conference in 2013. In Ephesians 2:1–10 there is a succinct outline of the Christian faith. St. Paul starts with the connection between sin and humanity’s natural condition. The result is an understanding of the sinner’s total depravity. In connection with this total depravity in mind, we can then have a clear understanding of God’s grace and the gift of faith. This leads us to realize that grace is unearned and undeserved, while our regeneration by faith is also from God and not of ourselves. Finally, St. Paul shows the connection between our regeneration and the Christian’s new obedience. In that relationship we find that good works are a necessary result of faith and thus not a cause

of salvation. Clear connections give precision to doctrine. Prof. Proksch is the head of New Testament studies at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

The sermon is one of the two major high points of the divine service in the Lutheran church. Our confessions state, “There is nothing that so attaches people to the church as good preaching.”¹ Preaching is essential for Christians to grow in the knowledge of salvation and to mature in their spiritual life and formation. In the essay, “Basic Rules for Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching,” Dr. Kuster answers two important questions: What are the basic rules for rhetoric, and how do we apply them to the art of preaching? Dr. Thomas Kuster is professor emeritus of Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary.

The phrase *visible saints* invokes the Puritan ecclesiological aspiration of bringing the visible church more into harmony with the invisible church of all believers. This idea achieved its definitive refinement in Puritan New England. Here church membership became limited to visible saints. The Puritan New Englanders defined these visible saints as *immediate members* who were qualified by a proof of faith. Baptism, furthermore, became restricted exclusively to these visible saints’ children who were called *mediate members*. Under theological, social, and political pressure, the 1662 Boston Synod, conversely, affirmed *meer membership*. Meer members referred to all professed members who had not given a proof of faith. Meer members would still not be permitted to attend the Lord’s Supper, but their children could be baptized. In “New England’s Visible Saints,” Dr. Timothy Schmeling explores three questions to better understand how Early Modern Anglo-American Reformed ecclesiology differs from Lutheran ecclesiology: How did the conception of immediate membership and mediate membership develop? How did they become standard practices in Puritan New England? How were they defended when threatened by the 1662 Boston Synod’s meer membership? Dr. Schmeling is an exegetical and historical theology professor at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Also included in this *Quarterly* are three sermons: one by Prof. Gaylin Schmeling on Psalm 1, one by Dr. Timothy Schmeling on Psalm 97, and the third by Dean Andrew Schmidt of Bethany Lutheran College on John 8:3–11.

– GRS

¹ Ap, XXIV, 51 (BSELK 638). *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, ed. Irene Dingel, et al., 1st ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

“Your Word is Truth”: An Exegetical Study of John 17 with Special Reference to Luther’s Works: Volume 69

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THE FIRST THING TO COME TO ONE’S MIND when considering John 17 is likely the great comfort that Jesus prays for His people. Sometimes lost in a consideration of this chapter, however, are the many doctrinal truths Jesus spoke in this prayer. Here, Jesus offers us great comfort in knowing that He intercedes for us, and He reminds us of a number of the teachings we study in our dogmatics textbooks. The two natures in Christ, the humiliation and exaltation of Christ, the nature of God’s Word, the unity of the Church, and more are taught or referenced by Christ in this single chapter. God’s Word is truth, and the truth of God’s Word is the source of our comfort and is the solid foundation for our faith and teaching.

This paper will give particular attention to Luther’s sermons on John 17 given between August and October of 1528 at the St. Mary parish in Wittenberg. Luther had taken over the serial preaching of John’s Gospel from Johannes Bugenhagen after Bugenhagen was called to advise the reformation in Braunschweig and Hamburg.¹ Luther gave the following introduction to this chapter:

Now this is the sum and substance of this chapter: After a good sermon belongs a good prayer. That is, once you have set forth the Word, you should begin to sigh and seek that it may have power and

¹ *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Publishing House, 1955–) 69:3. References will be abbreviated *LW*.

produce fruit as well. For since the Lord Christ had now set forth all His teaching and fulfilled His office and had blessed His disciples with a beautiful, lengthy sermon of comfort, He had to offer up a final supplication as well, both for them and for all Christians, so that He might perfectly fulfill His office as our sole High Priest and leave nothing undone that might serve to strengthen and sustain them, since He intended to leave them behind, alone in the world.²

This chapter can be broken into three main sections. In verses 1–5, Christ prays for Himself. In verses 6–19, Christ prays for the eleven. In verses 20–26, Christ prays for all believers. The first five verses of this chapter serve as something of an introduction. Jesus’ words here set the stage both for what immediately follows in this prayer and for His passion and exaltation to come. The opening words of His prayer remind us of His Person and nature.

John 17:1–5

¹Ταῦτα ἐλάλησεν Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶπεν· πάτερ, ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα· δόξασόν σου τὸν υἱόν, ἵνα ὁ υἱὸς δοξάσῃ σέ,

²καθὼς ἔδωκας αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν πάσης σαρκός, ἵνα πᾶν ὃ δέδωκας αὐτῷ δώσῃ αὐτοῖς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

³αὕτη δὲ ἐστὶν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σέ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν.

⁴ἐγὼ σε ἐδόξασα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τὸ ἔργον τελειώσας ὃ δέδωκάς μοι ἵνα ποιήσω·

⁵καὶ νῦν δόξασόν με σύ, πάτερ, παρὰ σεαυτῷ τῇ δόξῃ ἣν εἶχον πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι παρὰ σοί.³

Vocabulary

ἐπάρας – verb, participle, aorist, active, nominative, masculine, singular, from ἐπαίρω, “lift up”

γινώσκωσιν – verb, subjunctive, present, active, 3rd person, plural, from γινώσκω, “know”

τελειώσας – verb, participle, aorist, active, nominative, masculine, singular, from τελειόω, “complete”

² LW, 69:15.

³ Barbara Aland et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). All Greek citations in this paper use the NA28.

¹These things Jesus spoke, and having lifted up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, in order that the Son should glorify You,

²as You gave to Him authority over all flesh, that all whom you gave to Him He should give eternal life.

³And this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and whom You sent, Jesus Christ.

⁴I glorified You on the earth, having fulfilled the work which You had given Me that I should do.

⁵And now, You glorify Me, Father, in Your presence with the glory which I had with You before the world was (Author’s translation).

¹After Jesus had spoken these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you.

²For you gave him authority over all flesh, so that he may give eternal life to all those you have given him.

³This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.

⁴I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

⁵Now, Father, glorify me at your own side with the glory I had at your side before the world existed (EHV).⁴

Luther has some insightful comments regarding Jesus lifting up His eyes in prayer (*καὶ ἐπάρας τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν*) and our own rituals in prayer. He comments, “He has given prayer this honor and glory: that it also affects His outward behavior.”⁵ He goes on to write, “Thus it is of no great consequence whether a person stands, kneels, or prostrates himself, for these are bodily postures that are neither condemned nor commanded as necessary. But neither should these customs be despised, since Scripture and Christ Himself praise them.”⁶ How are we then to determine if a ritual is useful? Luther answers that too: “But wherever such gestures, singing, speaking, or reading occur with the purpose of enkindling the heart and awaking desire and devotion for prayer, then it is very beneficial and good.”⁷

⁴ *The Holy Bible: Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV)* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017).

⁵ *LW*, 69:16.

⁶ *LW*, 69:16.

⁷ *LW*, 69:17.

Luther explains the practical benefit of such ritual as well:

I speak like this so that, rather than flitting over the text as the wild spirits do, we may learn why such external words and actions are helpful and necessary: namely, so that the heart may be focused, rather than distracted, and fasten itself in its thoughts to the letters, just as one must grip a tree or a wall to keep from slipping, lest we flutter off and go astray with our own thoughts.⁸

Jesus' fivefold use of "glory" in this section gives us much to consider. The "hour" which had come was the hour of Jesus' passion. The Son is glorified by His service to the Father and mankind. The Son glorifies the Father by carrying out the work given Him by the Father and making the Father known. From eternity Jesus had glory with the Father. He is true God along with the Father (verse 5). And yet, the Son asks to be glorified by the Father.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon uses John 17:1 as an example of δόξαζω meaning "to cause the dignity and worth of some person or thing to become manifest and acknowledged."⁹ Luther defined it this way, "To glorify, however, means nothing other than to praise and exalt, to magnify and make known, so that all the world may know to speak and sing about it."¹⁰ Therefore, we see here the two natures in Christ.

According to His divinity, the Son has always had the glory of God for He is God. According to His humanity, He received glory from His Father. Harold Buls writes, "As true God Jesus had this glory from eternity. As the incarnate God-man Jesus' human nature received God's glory to save mankind. Now He is sitting at the right hand of the Father in glory and will glorify us when we die."¹¹

Jesus had glory from the beginning (verse 5) and yet He is glorified (verse 1). This is explained by the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. It is not that Christ's humanity did not possess all the divine majesty in the state of humiliation, but rather that according to that humanity Christ did not make full use of the divine majesty. As Hoenecke notes,

The two states, which all of Scripture and particularly Philippians 2:5–9 ascribe to Christ, namely, the states of humiliation

⁸ *LW*, 69:19.

⁹ Joseph Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), BibleWorks.

¹⁰ *LW*, 69:21.

¹¹ Harold Buls, "The Sermon Notes of Harold Buls: Trinity VII," *Buls' Notes* (electronic essay file), <http://pericope.org/buls-notes/john/john.php>.

and exaltation, have as their subject the incarnate Logos, more precisely his humanity, and are not to be distinguished so that the human nature with the exaltation entered into the possession of the divine majesty which it did not possess before but, rather, that it used and manifested completely the majesty it possessed since conception.¹²

Verses 2 (“as You gave to Him authority over all flesh”) and 5 (“glorify Me, Father, in Your own presence with the glory which I had with You before the world was”) also give indication of the communication of attributes. Here, the *genus majesticum* is seen. “The Son of God shares the attributes of his divine nature, its majesty and glory, with the assumed human nature for common possession, use, and designation.”¹³ “Authority” and “glory” which were Christ’s from eternity and thus the possession of His divine nature are shared with His human nature.

Thus, the exaltation consists in Christ according to His humanity making full use of the majesty which was the possession of that humanity from conception. This majesty was the possession of the humanity due to the communication of attributes. Various Christological errors have arisen through the misunderstanding of the communication of attributes (e.g., Kenoticism). These errors are not theoretical problems but falsehoods which destroy the very heart of the Christian faith: Christ and His work for us.

The Father would glorify the Son in the exaltation. Luther says, “How did this glorification take place? In no other way than that the Father again raised Him from the dead, cast the devil beneath His feet, and made Him King and Lord over all creatures, and caused this to be shouted forth publicly through the Gospel, to make it known in all the world.”¹⁴

This glorification is for our benefit. Even as Christ prays for Himself, He is praying for us. Luther: “For in this verse [verse 2] you hear that He is not praying for His own sake, in order to retain His glory for Himself, but so that His glory would avail and serve us for the possession of eternal life.”¹⁵

¹² Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 3:105.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3:87.

¹⁴ *LW*, 69:22.

¹⁵ *LW*, 69:28–29.

There are two particularly important grammatical points to be found in this section. The one leads us to a review of *subjective justification*. The other leads us to a review of the eternal existence of God the Son.

John's use of the ἵνα clause in verse 3 is worth noting because it is an example of an infrequent use of the ἵνα clause in Scripture. As a subset of the substantival clause, in which the dependent clause functions like a noun, Daniel Wallace calls it an "apposition clause," because the force of this ἵνα clause is "namely, that."¹⁶ The noun at the start of the verse, "eternal life" (αἰώνιος ζωή), and the dependent clause which follows and functions as a noun, "that they should know You, the only true God, and whom You sent, Jesus Christ," (ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σέ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν) are describing the same thing. For comparison, consider 1 John 3:11, "This is the message You have heard from the beginning: Love one another" ("Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους).

When Jesus speaks of eternal life in this verse, He refers to knowing God and the One God has sent. *This is what it means to have eternal life*. To have eternal life is to know God. The "knowing" is to know the Christ who was sent by the Father. Lenski comments, "Jesus is not defining the nature of eternal life but describing in what its reception and its possession consist."¹⁷ Luther: "In these words He expresses the form and formation of eternal life."¹⁸

It is through faith in Christ Jesus that we have eternal life. One cannot know God apart from Jesus Christ. Thus, Luther noted, "It is God's command that we should believe the Gospel about His Son and thus be saved. This is the true wisdom, as Christ also says (John 17:3): 'This is eternal life, that they know Thee, the true God, and Him, whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ.'"¹⁹

Apart from faith, one does not possess the forgiveness which Christ, by His life and death, won for all. To rightly "know" God is to trust the Gospel. Recall the words of Pieper,

When the sinner comes to faith in Christ or in the Gospel, he is at once justified before God by his faith. Since the Gospel offers him the forgiveness of sins gained by Christ for the whole world

¹⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 475.

¹⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 1121.

¹⁸ *LW*, 69:29.

¹⁹ *LW*, 1:161.

(objective justification), the acceptance of this offer, by faith, is all that is needed to accomplish his subjective justification. Subjective justification is meant when Paul says Rom. 3:28: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith.”²⁰

Luther says:

This is why I hold this passage [verse 3] dear, because it so clearly and plainly excludes all works and leaves them here below by speaking of knowledge alone... This one word “know,” then, like a mighty thunderclap, strikes down all doctrine based on human work, spiritual orders, and worship, as if by these means one could be freed from sins, become reconciled to God, and obtain grace.²¹

An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism makes use of verse 3 as a citation in question 110: “Why is the doctrine of the Trinity so important? The doctrine of the Trinity is so important because it is the teaching concerning the one true God, in whom alone there is salvation.”²² It also cites this verse in question 193: “What is true faith in Jesus Christ? True faith in Jesus Christ is this, that I, a lost and condemned sinner, know Jesus Christ as my only Savior from sin, death and the devil and trust with all my heart in Him alone.”²³

The use of $\pi\rho\delta$ in verse 5 is important in connection to the eternal nature of Christ. When used with the genitive case, $\pi\rho\delta$ has three basic uses: spatial (e.g., *in front of*), temporal (e.g., *before*), and rank (e.g., *priority*).²⁴ The use of $\epsilon\iota\upsilon\alpha\iota$ (verb, infinitive, present, active) eliminates the spatial and rank use because it indicates a timeframe. We are left then with the temporal. Therefore, we have Jesus Himself speaking of the eternal nature of His divine essence. Christ existed even before anything was created; Christ existed from eternity. Christ in this verse clearly states that His divine nature is eternal; He exists without beginning.

To refute the old heresy of Arianism, there was *not* a time when He was not, for He was before time began. Luther: “This again is a clear, bright text about Christ’s deity in opposition to the Arians.”²⁵ When

²⁰ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2:503.

²¹ *LW*, 69:38–39.

²² *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism* (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2014), question 110.

²³ *Ibid.*, question 193.

²⁴ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 379.

²⁵ *LW*, 69:46.

we study passages such as John 17:5, we likely think of the heresy of Arius, the Mormons, or the Jehovah's Witnesses. Yet, it's not only old or well-known heretics that deny Christ in this way, but new and obscure heretics as well.

This past winter, a "Christadelphian Church" moved into an old church building a few blocks from my own congregation. The unusual name caught the eye of many in my neighborhood, but few had heard of them prior to this. They are an anti-Trinitarian group which dates to the mid-1800s. One of their key tenants of belief is that Christ did not exist prior to His conception in Mary's womb. A hallmark of their teaching is, "Jesus is a man, not God!"²⁶ A review of their statements of faith indicates that their errors stem from rejecting the two natures of Christ and the personhood of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Yet, this group is presenting itself to my community as a "Christian Congregation." To be sure, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses present themselves in the same way. However, this group may be more dangerous because they do not appear to use extra biblical holy books nor elevate their founder (at least, not to the same extent as other cults). The hallmarks of a cult are not as easily discerned in this group. In my own Bible class, it took longer to explain why this group is not a Christian group than it did to explain why Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are not.

In the first five verses of John 17, Jesus looks ahead to what is coming—His passion and His exaltation—and He prays concerning His glory. In so doing, He teaches us about His own person and about the gift of eternal life. Luther offered this summary:

Dear Father, I have now done My task in the world, for which you sent Me. Now, for the sake of Your glory, I go to humiliation; I must allow Myself to be oppressed and condemned as the most wretched man the world has ever borne. Therefore, glorify Me again so that the world will have to hear and acknowledge that I am Your Son from eternity.²⁷

In the next section of this chapter, Jesus prays for the eleven and in so doing speaks concerning the Word of the Father and those who belong to Him.

²⁶ Christadelphians, "Our Faith and Beliefs," accessed May 15, 2019, <http://www.christadelphia.org/belief.php>.

²⁷ *LW*, 69:48.

John 17:6–10

⁶Εφανερώσά σου τὸ ὄνομα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις οὓς ἔδωκάς μοι ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου. σοὶ ἦσαν κάμοι αὐτοὺς ἔδωκας καὶ τὸν λόγον σου τετήρηκαν.

⁷νῦν ἔγνωκαν ὅτι πάντα ὅσα δέδωκάς μοι παρὰ σοῦ εἰσιν·

⁸ὅτι τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἔδωκάς μοι δέδωκα αὐτοῖς, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλαβον καὶ ἔγνωσαν ἀληθῶς ὅτι παρὰ σοῦ ἐξήλθον, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

⁹Εγὼ περὶ αὐτῶν ἐρωτῶ, οὐ περὶ τοῦ κόσμου ἐρωτῶ ἀλλὰ περὶ ὧν δέδωκάς μοι, ὅτι σοὶ εἰσιν,

¹⁰καὶ τὰ ἐμὰ πάντα σὰ ἐστίν καὶ τὰ σὰ ἐμὰ, καὶ δεδόξασμαι ἐν αὐτοῖς.

Vocabulary

τετήρηκαν – verb, indicative, perfect, active, 3rd person, plural, from τηρέω, “keep”

ἔγνωκαν – verb, indicative, perfect, active, 3rd person, plural, from γινώσκω, “know”

⁶I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave to Me out of the world. They were Yours, and You gave them to me, and they have kept Your word.

⁷Now they have known that all things, as many as You have given to Me, are from You.

⁸Because I have given to them the words which you gave to Me, and they have received and truly known that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent me.

⁹I pray concerning them. Not concerning the world I pray, but concerning those whom You have given Me, because they are Yours.

¹⁰And all Mine are Yours and Yours Mine, and I have been glorified in them (Author’s translation).

⁶“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

⁷Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you.

⁸For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

⁹I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them (EHV).

Verse 6 begins the section of the High Priestly Prayer in which Jesus prays for the eleven. This section builds on the previous by expounding further upon how the Father is glorified. Luther:

He Himself explains here what He means by glorifying the Father and completing His work, and He shows how and why this has taken place, namely, in no other way than as He says, "I have revealed Your name to the people whom You gave Me." To glorify the Father means to reveal His name by preaching of Him and depicting Him in our hearts as a kind Father, who has received us into His grace and forgives all sins, delivers from death and the devil, helps and protects in every trouble, not out of regard for any person, work, or merit, but out of pure, fatherly goodness, through Christ, His dear Son, etc."²⁸

This section contains several theologically significant points in connection with the imperfect tense. The use of the imperfect tense in verse 6 is significant as it relates to the doctrine of election. Luther saw the references to election in this verse and he used this verse specifically to write concerning the comfort of the doctrine of election. He wrote,

If you cling to our Lord Jesus Christ, you certainly are one of those whom God from the beginning elected to be His own; else you would not be here, nor would you listen to and accept such a revelation. Just look! With this one blow you have eliminated the great anxiety and all arguments about the secret decree of election, with which some people plague themselves almost to the point of insanity; and the only thing they accomplish is that they provide the devil an opportunity, by means of despair, to lead them into hell. Be assured of this: All such ideas and arguments about predestination are assuredly inspired by the devil. What Scripture says about it is not intended to burden and terrify the poor, afflicted souls who are aware of their sin and yearn to be free. The purpose of Scripture is to comfort them.²⁹

²⁸ *LW*, 69:49.

²⁹ Cited in C. F. W. Walther, *All Glory to God* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 291–292.

It is no wonder that Luther saw the doctrine of election in this verse. “They were [ἦσαν, indicative imperfect] yours,” Christ said. While the imperfect tense can on occasion refer to time other than the past, it most commonly refers to the past³⁰ and the context makes it clear that it should be taken this way in this verse.

The use of the imperfect tense is interesting for another reason. Wallace describes the imperfect as a “motion picture, portraying the action as it unfolds.”³¹ This certainly fits well with Christ describing His elect disciples. The elect were chosen from eternity (“they were Yours”). Christ’s Word brought them to faith in time (“I have manifested Your name”). In eternity, they will have the fullness of that election. No, Christ does not explicitly refer to the final end of election in this verse, but there is reference to that glory later in this chapter (specifically verses 12 and 24).

Election took place in eternity, and it is carried out in time through the work of Christ and the use of the Means of Grace. There is certainly an “unfolding” to election (before time began, in time, eternity of paradise) which fits well with the use of the imperfect tense.

Another insight related to this is to consider God as the cause and we as the recipient of election. This too fits well with the grammatical use of the imperfect. James Voelz describes it this way: “Focus upon connection between actor and action in past time is conveyed by [the imperfect tense].”³² God has elected the elect. God is the agent behind our election. It was His choice in eternity. It was His work in the person of Christ. It was (is) His work in the Means of Grace to bring us to faith and keep us in the faith.

The use of the perfect tense in verse 7 is important: *ἄρτι ἐγινωκαν* (“Now they have known”). This is an example of the so called “intensive perfect.” The intensive perfect functions to emphasize results which have been produced by a past action.³³ Everything about Jesus had come from the Father. The disciples knew this through the Word Jesus delivered to them from the Father. They believed that the Son had been sent from the Father. The Word which had been given to them produced their ongoing faith.

³⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 232.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

³² James Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 68.

³³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 574.

It is difficult to succinctly convey this idea of a past action producing present results in English. Thus, some translations render *ἐγνωναν* as “know,” stressing the present results, (ESV, NIV84, EHV) and some as “have known,” stressing the past action of revelation (KJV, NKJV). Either way, we should recognize the profound effect Jesus’ Word had on the disciples.

Luther writes:

Behold, the fruit of the Word is that wherever it is received and kept, one gains a knowledge of all the grace and blessings that the heavenly Father has given us through Christ and is able to delight in and rely on them—a knowledge that neither human reason nor wisdom, nay, not even the preaching of the Law, is able to grant. This is the true bright light and glory, when God is seen before our very eyes, with unveiled face, without any covering or veil, as St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3.³⁴

This Word of Christ is the Word of the Father, as Jesus says in verse 8 (*ὅτι τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἔδωκάς μοι δέδωκάς αὐτοῖς*). Through this Word, the disciples knew and believed the truth. Luther: “Everything depends entirely on the Word, through which we receive all things, provided only that we know that everything that Christ speaks is the Word of the Father and that we depend on His mouth alone, casting aside all other thoughts or whatever else may intrude.”³⁵

In verse 9, Christ said, “I pray concerning them” (*ἐγὼ περὶ αὐτῶν ἐρωτῶ*). We see the great personal interest that Christ has in His followers by use of the emphatic *ἐγὼ*. They are of the greatest concern to Him.

As the great High Priest, Christ was about to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. As our great High Priest, Christ interceded, and continues to intercede, on behalf of those who trust in Him. In the next section, we will hear precisely what it is that Christ prays for concerning His followers, but what we see here is an emphasis on how greatly concerned Christ is with His followers. He is so concerned as to pray to His Father for them.

In this section, where Christ prays for the eleven, we take great comfort in seeing our election from eternity, the power of Christ’s Word, and the concern that Christ has for His people. Though Christ

³⁴ *LW*, 69:59.

³⁵ *LW*, 69:59–60.

specifically speaks of the eleven, His words here certainly apply to all the elect.

Jesus’ statement in verse 9, “Not concerning the world I pray” (οὐ περὶ τοῦ κόσμου ἐρωτῶ), has been misunderstood by some and misused by others. The Reformed have tried to use this to teach a limited atonement of only the elect.³⁶ Critics of the Bible have tried to use this to show a contradiction with the verses of Scripture which record Christ praying for unbelievers (e.g., Luke 23:34).³⁷

Pieper neatly explains why there is no contradiction with Christ’s words elsewhere nor implication of a limited atonement.

The high-priestly office of Christ, embraced, in agreement with the Old Testament type (Ex. 30:7–8; Lev. 16:12–13), also the offering of intercession for men. Is. 53:12 names besides the *satisfaction* also the *intercession*: “He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.” Christ intercedes (a) for all men, also for the wicked, just as He also bore their sins. Example: Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (*intercession generalis*). He intercedes (b) as Head of the Church particularly for the believers. Example: John 17 (*intercession specialis*). The purpose of His supplication for the unbelievers is that they may obtain the forgiveness of sins gained for them; He prays for the believers that they may retain the forgiveness of sins gained for them. John 17:9: “I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou has given Me” does not deny that Christ makes the intercession for the unbelievers. I Tim 4:10 solves the seeming contradiction: “The living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe.”³⁸

Luther shows us the proper warning we should take from this statement of Christ—a warning the world ignores. “On the other hand, it is terrifying when He says, ‘I do not pray for the world.’ Let us see to it that we are not found among the flock for whom He does not wish to pray. For the inevitable consequence of this is that they are completely lost. Christ simply forsakes them and wants to know nothing about them.”³⁹

³⁶ Harold Buls, “Study of John 17:1–11,” *Buls’ Notes* (electronic essay file), http://pericope.org/buls-notes/john/john_17_1_11.htm.

³⁷ Pieper, 2:503.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *LW*, 69:62.

How are we to make sense of this in light of the explanation above concerning Christ's general intercession for all? Luther aptly explains this too:

But the difference is this: He does not pray for the world in the same way nor in the same measure that He prays for His Christians. For Christians and for all who are to be converted He prays that they would remain, increase, and continue in true faith and not fall away, and [He prays] that those who are not yet believers would depart from their ways and come to faith. This is a proper and good prayer for the world, just as we all should pray. But for the world in its present conduct and condition, as it fumes and rages against the Gospel, He in no way wants prayers to be said as if God should be pleased at such behavior or connive at it and let it go. Rather, we should pray the opposite, that God would restrain the world, thwart its plans, and bring them to naught.⁴⁰

On the other hand, the Christian has great comfort in knowing that the same Christ who secured forgiveness for him actively prays to the Father that he should retain that forgiveness unto everlasting life. Jesus prays (ἐρωτῶ) for the believer. He entreats the Father for our benefit. Luther: "Whoever perseveres in [the Word], takes thought for it, and prays for it has the comfort here through Christ's prayer that he will remain steadfast in it, and no power will accomplish anything against it."⁴¹

Once more we have reference to the divinity of the Son and "glory" in verse 10: "And all Mine are Yours and Yours Mine, and I have been glorified in them" (καὶ τὰ ἐμὰ πάντα σὰ ἐστὶν καὶ τὰ σὰ ἐμέ, καὶ δεδόξασμαι ἐν αὐτοῖς.). In the first part of the verse, Jesus speaks as a "co-owner" of the disciples. The disciples belong to Jesus just as much as they do to the Father. Both the Son and the Father are true God, and they share all things for they are one.

Luther stresses the word πάντα as proving that Christ is true God.

This no creature can say before God. For you must understand this not only of that which the Father has given Him on earth, but also of His one divine essence with the Father. For He speaks not only of His disciples and Christians, but comprehends in one heap all that is the Father's, eternal, almighty essence, life, truth, righteousness,

⁴⁰ *LW*, 69:62–63.

⁴¹ *LW*, 69:66.

etc., that is, He confesses freely that He is true God, for the word “All that is Thine is Mine” permits nothing to be excluded. If everything is His, then all the eternal Godhead is His; otherwise He cannot and dare not use the word “all.”⁴²

Jesus is glorified by the objects of His work of redemption. Luther: “Therefore, this glorification is nothing else than having a bright and clear knowledge of Christ as the one through whom the Father has revealed Himself to us, so that we know what He has given us through this, His Son.”⁴³

In this section, Christ prays specifically concerning the eleven. By application, His words certainly apply to all believers. In praying for the eleven, Christ comforts us with reference to our election and with the reminder that we belong to Him and He prays for us. In the next set of verses, Christ prays in specifics for the eleven.

John 17:11–16

¹¹καὶ οὐκέτι εἰμι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἰσὶν, καὶ ἐγὼ πρὸς σέ ἔρχομαι. πάτερ ἄγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ᾧ δέδωκάς μοι, ἵνα ᾧσιν ἐν καθῶς ἡμεῖς.

¹²ὅτε ἤμην μετ’ αὐτῶν ἐγὼ ἐτήρουν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου ᾧ δέδωκάς μοι, καὶ ἐφύλαξα, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀπώλετο εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, ἵνα ἡ γραφὴ πληρωθῇ.

¹³νῦν δὲ πρὸς σέ ἔρχομαι καὶ ταῦτα λαλῶ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἵνα ἔχωσιν τὴν χαρὰν τὴν ἐμὴν πεπληρωμένην ἐν ἑαυτοῖς.

¹⁴ἐγὼ δέδωκα αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον σου καὶ ὁ κόσμος ἐμίσησεν αὐτούς, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου καθῶς ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμι ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου.

¹⁵οὐκ ἔρωτῶ ἵνα ἄρῃς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου, ἀλλ’ ἵνα τηρήσῃς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ.

¹⁶ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ εἰσὶν καθῶς ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμι ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου.

Vocabulary

ᾧσιν – verb, subjunctive, present, active, 3rd person, plural, from εἰμί, “I am”

ἐφύλαξα – verb, indicative, aorist, active, 1st person, singular, from φυλάσσω, “guard”

πεπληρωμένην – verb, participle, perfect, passive, accusative, feminine, singular, from πληρόω, “fill”

⁴² Cited in Paul Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: New Testament*, vol. 1 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 504.

⁴³ *LW*, 69:69.

¹¹And I am no longer in the world and these are in the world; I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You had given to Me, that they may be one just as We.

¹²When I was with them I kept them in Your name, the ones whom You had given Me, and I guarded, and not one of them perished except the son of destruction, that the Scripture should be fulfilled.

¹³But now I am coming to You, and these things I speak in the world that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

¹⁴I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

¹⁵I do not ask that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the Evil One.

¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world (Author's translation).

¹¹I am no longer going to be in the world, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by your name, which you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

¹²While I was with them, I kept those you gave me safe in your name. I protected them and not one of them was destroyed, except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

¹³But now I am coming to you, and I am saying these things in the world, so that they may be filled with my joy.

¹⁴I have given them your word. The world hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

¹⁵I am not asking that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the Evil One.

¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world (EHV).

Regarding the phrase, “And I am no longer in the world” (*καὶ οὐκέτι εἶμι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ*), Luther asked if this was ammunition for the enthusiasts who insist that it is not possible for Christ to be present everywhere in His humanity (and thus cannot be present in the Supper). He gave this answer,

But we give an answer in accord with Scripture. To be “in the world” means to be in this outward existence, perceptible to the senses, that is, in this life that the world uses and lives, called a natural life, in which one must eat, drink, sleep, work, have house and property—in sum, must make use of the world and all the necessities of this life. On the other hand, they are said not to be in the world any longer

if they are withdrawn and separated from all the things just listed, so that they do not need to eat, drink, go, stand—in short, they have no need of any natural, bodily activity... not that He is completely separated from the world and no more with us, but that He does not have to concern Himself as a human being with His physical life.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, where is it that Christ is going? Luther: “But if He is coming to the Father, He must then be everywhere the Father is. Now, the Father is everywhere, in and outside heaven and earth and all creatures, so that He cannot be bound or fixed to any particular place as the stars are fixed in the heavens.”⁴⁵

Jesus referred to the Father as “Holy Father.” From the following context, we note that not only does Jesus call the Father “holy” (ἅγιε) because He is holy in and of Himself, but also because He makes the disciples holy. Pieper states that God’s holiness indicates two things about Him: “God’s supreme majesty and transcendence,”⁴⁶ as well as, “the absolute ethical purity of God.”⁴⁷ God is inherently ἅγιος. In His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus teaches that this holy God makes His people to be holy in His sight. The Father would then keep the disciples holy by His Word.

In reference to the eleven, Christ asks His holy Father to “protect them by Your name.” The “name” (ὄνομα) of God is the revelation of God, the Word of God. Lenski explains,

For [your name] designates the contents of the Word, the revelation by which we know him whose “name” is thus made ours. Hence Jesus also says that the Father has given him this “name.” The implication is that Jesus was to give this “name” (revelation, Word) to the disciples, which he says he did (v. 6). Another implication is that the disciples received this “name” (v. 8) and are now “in” this name, in living connection with what it reveals to them. But, still being in the world which is full of delusion and spurns this name, the disciples need divine care lest they lose their connection with the saving “name.” Here it is “thy name,” the Father’s, elsewhere, as in Acts 4:1–12, it is Jesus’ name. The contents of both is the same.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *LW*, 69:72.

⁴⁵ *LW*, 69:73.

⁴⁶ Pieper, 1:456.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Lenski, 1136.

Christ prays for such protection for the disciples so that, “they may be one just as we” (ἵνα ὡσιν ἐν καθῶς ἡμεῖς.). Many have argued on the basis of this verse that churches should join together in fellowship in order to fulfill Jesus’ prayer regardless of unity in the teachings of God’s Word. In our own history, President Stub made use of Jesus’ prayer at the 1913 convention of the old Norwegian Synod to imply that Jesus favored the merger. The argument was that the Norwegians should be “one” as Jesus prayed and the merger would make them one.⁴⁹

Daniel Deutschlander exposes the flaw in such arguments: “But Jesus’ unity with his Father is one of essence, not organization; so too the unity and oneness of the church is an essential unity of faith in Christ without reference to outward visible organization form.”⁵⁰ The proper fulfillment then of this prayer is found in the invisible Church which is created and preserved by the Gospel; it is not found in an outward “unity” based upon compromise of God’s Word. Those who believe in Christ share this invisible bond of faith—Christ has bound them to Himself and to one another. In the case of the eleven, they are one and Christ prayed that they remain so in the midst of the opposition they would face (and of which He spoke in the following verses). Luther agrees with this understanding.⁵¹

The unity of the Church then is found in the Word of Christ. Therefore, there is a connection between the invisible Church and the exercising of church fellowship. Buls notes, “The unity among Christians is caused by the Father, working through the Word of God, and for which unity Christ prayed. Unity among Christians is not caused by Christians themselves. They discover it among themselves when they compare with each other what they believe and practice.”⁵²

True unity cannot be found in “agreeing to disagree.” God is not divided in such a manner, and so the unity He gives certainly is not divided in such a manner. Nor can true unity be found in setting aside certain teachings for that would dishonor the revelation of God’s name. A manmade “unity” will seek unity even in disagreement or will seek to set aside certain teachings, but that is not the unity Jesus speaks of in

⁴⁹ Donald L. Moldstad, “Born Amid War, Born of War: The Development and Early Years of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 59, nos. 2 and 3 (June and September 2019): 237, 245.

⁵⁰ Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015), 451.

⁵¹ *LW*, 69:76–78.

⁵² Harold Buls, “Study of John 17:11b–19,” *Buls’ Notes* (electronic essay file), http://pericope.org/buls-notes/john/john_17_11b_19.htm.

this text. If unity is caused by God’s revelation, then unity cannot come about by disregard of that revelation.

The Spirit incorporates us into the body of Christ, the invisible Church, through faith. Though this Church is invisible, believers find fellow believers where the Means of Grace are administered. Fellowship, therefore, is exercised on the basis of those Means of Grace, the pure marks of the church. The invisible Church is a matter of *fides qua*, but the visible church and fellowship are a matter of *fides quae*.

Indeed Luther sees this section of the prayer as being prayed against false doctrine. “If we were to pray all of this in our German, we would say, ‘Dear Father, please protect them from all false doctrine.’”⁵³ Elsewhere he writes, “For outside the Word there is no more unity but only division, countless sects and factions, which the devil throws confusedly together by means of his nets and snares—the doctrines of men—where everyone seeks to achieve some special holiness by his own works, etc.”⁵⁴

The remaining verses of this section (12–15) connect to verse 11. Jesus prays for the disciples’ protection as He is now departing to the Father. The disciples would be yet in this world and face the hatred of the world. Note the use of the imperfect and aorist tenses in verse 12. “When I was with them I kept them in your name, the ones whom you had given me, and I guarded.” Jesus says that He “kept them” (ἐτήρουν, indicative, imperfect, active, first person, singular). Jesus had in the past constantly kept them safe. The result is that they are “guarded” now (ἐφύλαξα, indicative, aorist, active, first person, singular).

Judas should not be seen as the exception to Jesus’ protection. Though Judas’s fall was foretold in Scripture, Judas’s sin and damnation remain his own fault. Lenski notes that Judas’s title as “the son of destruction” (ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας) means that he is “a son or product of eternal damnation; compare the similar designations in Matt. 23:15; II Thess. 2:2.”⁵⁵ In other words, Judas’s destruction came about because of what he was, not because he was “fated” to it.

The use of this title for Judas gives us insight in identifying the Antichrist. Gaylin Schmeling explains,

He [the Antichrist] is called the man of sin and the son of perdition. Remember that the term “son of perdition” is used of Judas in John 17:13, thereby indicating that the Antichrist is a Judas or a

⁵³ LW, 69:74.

⁵⁴ LW, 69:80.

⁵⁵ Lenski, 1140.

betrayer from within the outward visible church. He is not a political monster like Hitler or Stalin. The Antichrist sits in the temple of God and acts like God. He is not a political leader but a religious leader who expects to be honored as God. He is not Satan himself but he is from Satan and he will remain until the judgment.⁵⁶

Though the Christian faces hatred in this life, it is through the Word of God that we have joy. Christ said, “But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” Buls notes four characteristics of this τὴν χαρὰν, this “joy.” “It is a constant ‘having;’ It is Jesus’ very own joy; It is not partial but total; It is their very own.”⁵⁷ Jesus could speak of such joy on such a sad occasion because He was certain the Father would guard the disciples through the Word, and because of the joy that was in front of Him, the joy of sitting at the Father’s right hand in the exaltation (“I am coming to you”).

Luther highlights the importance of this Word in connection with the “these things” (ταῦτα) of verse 13: “Here once again it is clearly indicated and powerfully demonstrated why the external Word or oral preaching of the Gospel is helpful and necessary within Christendom, for He does not want to protect and preserve them without external means.”⁵⁸

This joy is ours even in the midst of the hatred we receive from the world. We draw our joy from the Word which we have in this world. Christ said that the world hates His disciples, “because they are not of the world.” Rather, the disciples are like Jesus: “Just as I am not of the world” (καθὼς ἐγὼ οὐκ εἶμι ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου). By the gift of the Word given out of God’s grace, the disciples are not of the world in the same sense that Jesus is not of the world. Lenski writes, “... the gift of the Word having changed the spiritual nature of the disciples making them foreigners to the world.”⁵⁹ Christians have the gift of God, His Word, and therefore they are hated by the world for they are no longer of the same nature as the unbelieving world.

Therefore, Christ prays for their protection in the next verse (15). Should ἵνα τηρήσῃς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ be taken as keeping them

⁵⁶ Gaylin R. Schmeling, *Bread of Life from Heaven: The Theology of the Means of Grace, the Public Ministry, and Church Fellowship* (Mankato, MN: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Press, 2009), 286.

⁵⁷ Buls, “Study of John 17:11b–19.”

⁵⁸ *LW*, 69:83.

⁵⁹ Lenski, 1143.

from “evil” or from “the Evil One”? Grammatically, both translations are acceptable. Wendland and Albrecht state that, “the Evil One” is preferable for the following reason: “Paul reminded the Ephesians that the Christian’s struggle in the world is against Satan and his forces (Eph 6:12). However, in the final analysis either translation amounts to much the same thing since Satan’s hand is so inextricably found in the evil that surrounds us.”⁶⁰

In verse 16, Christ then repeats what was said in verse 14. He stresses that He is not of this world by means of the emphatic ἐγὼ. Christ and His followers are different from the world. In the following verses, Jesus will show us how His disciples will be protected from the world.

John 17:17–19

¹⁷ἀγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθειά ἐστιν.

¹⁸καθὼς ἐμέ ἀπέστειλας εἰς τὸν κόσμον, κάγω ἀπέστειλα αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κόσμον·

¹⁹καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐγὼ ἀγιάζω ἑμαυτόν, ἵνα ᾧσιν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἡγιασμένοι ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.

Vocabulary

ἡγιασμένοι – verb, participle, perfect, passive, nominative, masculine, plural, from ἀγιάζω, “sanctify”

¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

¹⁸Just as You sent Me into the world, I sent them into the world.

¹⁹And on behalf of them I sanctify Myself, that they also themselves may be sanctified in truth. (Author’s translation)

¹⁷“Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.

¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world.

¹⁹I sanctify myself for them, so they also may be sanctified by the truth. (EHV)

In the first part of verse 17 (ἀγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ), the preposition ἐν is used to indicate “sphere.” Lenski notes, “The thought goes deeper than means or agency. The preposition indicates sphere. Jesus has already placed the disciples into this sphere; they are no strangers to the

⁶⁰ E. H. Wendland and G. J. Albrecht, *Sermon Studies on the Gospels (ILCW Series B)* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1987), 220.

truth. It now surrounds their souls, lifting them away from the world and upward to God.”⁶¹

Certainly Christ had already placed the disciples into this “sphere.” The Father would continue this sanctifying. It would continue to be carried out in one and the same way: through the Word. Luther described this “sanctifying” this way:

For the first and purest kind of saintliness is the Word, in which there is no fault, no spot, no sin; but it is so saintly that it needs no remission of sins, because it is God’s truth, as we read in John 17:17: “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth.” In that saintliness we, who have been called through the Word, glory. It is outside us; it is not our work. It is not formal righteousness; but it is a heavenly saintliness communicated to us through the Word, and indeed through the spoken Word. Therefore we proclaim that righteousness and oppose it to all forms of righteousness and saintliness of the pope and all hypocrites, for it is unpolluted saintliness. I have the Word. I am saintly, righteous, and pure, without any fault and indictment, insofar as I have the Word. Thus Christ Himself says (John 15:3): “You are already made clean by the Word which I have spoken to you.”⁶²

The eleven were and would be sanctified—set apart. They were set apart to God. This took place not through their works but through the Word of God. This Word is truth.

The lack of the article with “truth” (ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθειά ἐστιν) should not lead us in this case to determine that ἀλήθειά is indefinite. A noun with the article is never indefinite, but the opposite is not always true. A noun lacking the article can be indefinite, qualitative, or definite.⁶³ Abstract nouns, such as “truth” here, frequently lack the article and yet are definite. Wallace calls this instance an example of “qualitative-definite.”⁶⁴

Lenski agrees with this and paraphrases Jesus’ words this way: “Thine own Word is truth, composed wholly of truth, without an admixture of falsehood.”⁶⁵ In every word and on every point the Word is

⁶¹ Lenski, 1146.

⁶² *LW*, 5:213.

⁶³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 243.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 249–250.

⁶⁵ Lenski, 1147.

true in all respects. God’s Word is without error and it is certain. This is the Word that sanctifies and saves.

Luther states:

So now this is the meaning of the prayer: “I see clearly how the world is striving and running after great holiness, and everyone sets up something of his own in order to appear the holiest. But protect them, dear Father, from such specious and hypocritical holiness, and make them genuinely holy...” If you want to know what genuine holiness really is so that you can distinguish it from all other kinds, look only to the Word and do not be deceived by appearances. This is the right touchstone; indeed, it is the Word itself that alone makes real and true holiness. Let others boast of their holiness in tonsures, cowls, cinctures, fasting, vigils, ascetic life, special exercises, and great suffering, etc. But know that whatever is not the Word or is not contained in the Word is not holy but is undoubtedly false and deceptive.⁶⁶

Our catechism explanation cites this verse in three different places. The first is in reference to verbal inspiration: “What assurance does this doctrine of verbal inspiration give us? This teaching of verbal inspiration assures us that the Bible is God’s Word and therefore contains no errors in any of its parts or words.”⁶⁷

It also cites this verse in reference to the work of the Holy Spirit: “How does the Holy Spirit bring you the Gospel? The Holy Spirit brings me the Gospel in the sacred means of grace: the Word of God, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”⁶⁸

Lastly, it cites this verse in connection with the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “For what do we pray in the First Petition? In the First Petition we pray that our heavenly Father would grant us the grace to honor His name by pure teaching and holy living.”⁶⁹

Verse 18 contains the fourth (and final) use of *καθὼς* (“just as”) in this section. There is a logical flow to its use throughout verses 11–18. The unity of the invisible church, the unity of the communion of saints, is like the unity of the Father and the Son (verse 11). The world hates those who belong to this communion of saints because such are not of the world just as Jesus is not of the world (verse 14). Yet, this is not

⁶⁶ *LW*, 69:91.

⁶⁷ *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism*, question 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, question 188.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, question 248.

reason for us to despair for this is proof of the fact that we are like Jesus: we belong to God's kingdom (verse 16). Now, as those who belong to God's kingdom, we are sent into the world just as Jesus was sent into the world (verse 18).

The Father has sent the Son into the world. What the Son accomplished in the world for us will be explained in the next verse, but here the comparison is made between that sending of the Son and the sending of the disciples. *Buls* comments,

In a sense, every day of the life of a Christian is like Christmas because Jesus is sending the Christian among men, into the world. This commission covers the entire life of the Christian: his public and private life, his relationship to members of his family, the use of time, confessing Jesus in word and deed before men, etc.⁷⁰

Luther says:

Here you see why He is praying that they be sanctified: namely, because He has set them apart and is sending them out to preach the Gospel. And with this He confirms the beloved apostles as doctors and preachers and fixes and binds us to their mouth—all of us, learned and unlearned, so that everyone must humble himself, no matter how clever and wise he is, and accept poor, ignorant fisherman as teachers and learn to listen to them as to the Lord Christ Himself.⁷¹

How then were the disciples sanctified? By the work of Christ: “And on behalf of them, I sanctify Myself, that they also themselves may be sanctified in truth” (καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐγὼ ἀγιάζω ἑμαυτόν, ἵνα ᾧσιν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἡγιασμένοι ἐν ἀληθείᾳ). Jesus has accomplished this sanctification in their stead (vicariously). Jesus set Himself apart (“sanctified”) to suffer, die, and rise again. He did this for the sake of the disciples. Luther: “But by ‘sanctify’ He means here exercising and carrying out a priestly office or work.”⁷²

The use of ἡγιασμένοι (participle, perfect, passive) is noteworthy. *Buls* says that it is, “durative, denoting consummation, not just in the life to come, but now already.”⁷³ The disciples’ being sanctified is a present reality that will have its fullness in the life to come.

⁷⁰ *Buls*, “Study of John 17:11b–19.”

⁷¹ *LW*, 69:94.

⁷² *LW*, 69:98.

⁷³ *Buls*, “Study of John 17:11b–19.”

Pieper makes use of this verse in his notes regarding the *opera ad extra* of the Holy Trinity. “Finally, the work of sanctification is also [in addition to being the work of the Holy Spirit] the work of the Father, and of the Son, for both sent the Spirit (John 14:16, 26); the Father has elected us unto sanctification (2 Thess. 2:13), and the Son sanctifies us through His Word (John 17:19), and He is made unto us sanctification (I Cor. 1:2, 30).”⁷⁴

Therefore, Pieper concludes the following regarding the *opera ad extra* of the Holy Trinity, “Scripture therefore teaches the twofold truth: 1) That each of the *opera ad extra* (creation, redemption, sanctification) must be attributed to one Person in particular; 2) that the same works must be ascribed to all Persons. The *opera ad extra* are common to all three Persons because each of the Persons has the divine essence entirely and indivisibly.”⁷⁵

Pieper also makes use of this verse in his discussion of the Sacerdotal Office of Christ in the state of His humiliation. After first establishing that Christ reconciled the whole world to God, he then uses John 17:19 as one of the passages to show how Christ has done this: “Christ reconciled the world to God by offering Himself as the Propitiation to God for the sins of mankind. John 17:19: ‘For their sakes I sanctify Myself.’”⁷⁶ We therefore here see the Vicarious Atonement. Christ gave Himself that we should be holy. His sacrifice in our place has rendered satisfaction to God which has changed His wrath into grace.

There are only two citations of John 17 in the Confessions. One is taken from this section and is found in the Formula of Concord Solid Declaration. Article II addresses free will and conversion and states,

Out of His immense goodness and mercy, God provides for the public preaching of His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan for our redemption, that of the holy, only saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. By this preaching He gathers an eternal Church for Himself from the human race and works in people’s hearts true repentance, knowledge of sins, and true faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. By this means, and in no other way (i.e., through His holy Word, when people hear it preached or read it, and through the holy Sacraments when they are used according to His Word), God desires to call people to eternal salvation. He desires to draw them to Himself and

⁷⁴ Pieper, 1:423.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2:343.

convert, regenerate, and sanctify them. “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” (1 Corinthians 1:21) “[Peter] will tell you what you must do.” (Acts 10:6) “So faith comes from the preaching (*der Predigt*) and preaching through the Word of Christ” (Romans 10:17 Luther). “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. . . . I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.” (John 17:17–20) The eternal Father calls down from heaven about His dear Son and about all who preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name, “Listen to Him” (Matthew 17:5).⁷⁷

Luther powerfully describes the holiness of the Christian:

They are not called holy because they are without sin or are becoming holy through works—just the opposite, for of themselves, with all their works, they are nothing but sinners and are damned. Yet they become holy through an alien holiness, the holiness of Christ the Lord, which through faith is bestowed on them and becomes their own. This holiness is so mighty and powerful that it covers and wipes away all the sins and iniquities that remain in human flesh and blood. As I have often said: Christ’s kingdom is nothing but sheer forgiveness, a kingdom that deals solely with sin and constantly blots it out, covers, cleanses, and makes pure as long as we live on earth.⁷⁸

This concludes the portion of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer in which He prays for the eleven. This section reveals much to us about election, the person of Christ, fellowship, the nature and work of the Word, the Holy Trinity, and Christ’s vicarious atonement. In the next section, the final section of Jesus’ prayer (verses 20–26), Christ prays for all believers.

John 17:20–23

²⁰Οὐ περι τούτων δὲ ἐρωτῶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ περι τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ,

²¹ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὧσιν, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ ἀγάω ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ὧσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

⁷⁷ *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), FC SD II, 50–52.

⁷⁸ *LW*, 69:101.

²²καὶ γὰρ τὴν δόξαν ἣν δέδωκάς μοι δέδωκα αὐτοῖς, ἵνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἓν·

²³ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ σὺ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν, ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας.

Vocabulary

πιστεύῃ – verb, subjunctive, present, active, 3rd person, singular, from πιστεύω, “believe”

τετελειωμένοι – verb, participle, perfect, passive, nominative, masculine, plural, from τελειόω, “fulfill”

²⁰And I am asking not concerning these alone, but also concerning the ones believing through their word in Me,

²¹in order that they all should be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, in order that they also should be in Us, in order that the world should believe that You sent me.

²²And I have given to them the glory which You have given to Me, in order that they should be one just as We are one:

²³I in them and You in Me, in order that they be perfected into one, in order that the world should know that You sent Me and You loved them just as You loved Me (Author’s translation).

²⁰“I am praying not only for them, but also for those who believe in me through their message. ²¹May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.

²²I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one:

²³I in them, and you in me. May they become completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (EHV).

Here is great comfort for us Gentiles. Luther writes:

Yet so that a fainthearted conscience might not have any occasion to doubt and say, “To be sure, He prayed for the apostles and the Jews (to whom they were sent); but where does that leave me?” therefore, He anticipates this question and so names and includes us Gentiles as well and embraces all Christendom until the Last Day in the prayer, so that it extends throughout the whole world, wherever the apostles’ Word and preaching reaches and is received in faith, no

place or person excluded. This is our confidence and comfort, treasure and jewel. For us Gentiles there is surely no more comforting passage in Scripture than this one.⁷⁹

These four verses focus upon the unity of believers in time. Through the proclamation of the Gospel, faith is created. The object of faith is always Christ (εἰς ἐμὲ). Faith in Jesus, created by the Gospel, unites believers. It is also through faith that we receive “glory.” *Buls* comments, “Here Jesus is speaking about His human nature. As God He already had this glory. God gave the human nature of Christ glory not because He needed it, but so that He could give it to the believer, the right to be the children of God. We don’t have this glory on our own, it is a gift of the Father to the Son who has given it to us.”⁸⁰

What has been said above regarding unity applies here as well. Luther reiterates,

“According to this same example [unity of Father and Son], they also should be one with one another, in such a way that they are also one with Us in the same unity, that is, that they should be one body with You and Me. In sum, they should all be one and wholly one in both of Us, indeed, so completely one loaf that they possess everything that lies in Your power and in Mine.” That is, we too, become partakers of the divine nature, as Peter says (2 Peter 1). For though Christ and the Father are one in a different, higher, incomprehensible manner because of the divine essence, we nevertheless possess all this so that it is ours, and we enjoy what is His.⁸¹

This unity has a blessed result: “In order that the world should believe that you sent me” (ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας). Luther states: “This is the fruit that shall follow from and through such unity: that Christ’s Word be spread abroad and be received in the world as God’s Word, containing an almighty, divine, invincible power and an eternal treasure of grace and salvation.”⁸²

Christ speaks to three “unities” in verse 23. First, Christ speaks of the mystical union: “I in them” (ἐγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς). Chemnitz refers to Cyril’s use of this verse in his expounding upon this mystical union.

⁷⁹ *LW*, 69:102.

⁸⁰ Harold *Buls*, “Study of John 17:20–26,” *Buls’ Notes* (electronic essay file), http://pericope.org/buls-notes/john/john_17_20_26.htm.

⁸¹ *LW*, 69:105.

⁸² *LW*, 69:106.

He [Cyril] explains the words, “I in them and You in Me” [John 17:23], by saying: “Bodily the Son of Man as man is united with us through the mystical benediction; but spiritually, as God, He restores our spirit by the grace of His own Spirit to participation in His nature. Christ, therefore, is the nexus of our union with God, being united with us as man, but with God the Father by nature as God. We have been made complete, therefore, and led back to union with God the Father by the mediation of the Savior. For when we receive bodily and substantially the Son of God who is united by nature with God the Father, we are glorified, for we have been made partakers of the supreme nature.”⁸³

Luther emphasizes the connection of the mystical union to faith and the comfort of this mystical union:

Faith, however, is not an idle wavering concept but a living, serious, comforting, and undoubting confidence of the heart in this matchless glory whereby we become one substance with Christ and through Him with the Father—one substance in such a way that, just as little as Christ can be severed or isolated from the Father, so little is it possible for Christendom and each Christian to be separated from Him.⁸⁴

Second, Christ speaks of the unity in essence He shares with the Father: “You in me” (σὺ ἐν ἐμοί). Pieper notes that this section indicates that each Person of the Trinity has the same divine essence in its fullness. “Each person has the one divine essence . . . the three Persons are in one another and reciprocally interpenetrate, interpermeate, each other.”⁸⁵

Third, Christ speaks of the unity of believers “in order that they should be perfected into one.” There is an interesting grammatical note to be made here. The phrase “in order that they should be perfected into one” (ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν) is noteworthy for its use of ὧσιν with the participle lacking an article. It is an example of a “periphrastic participle,” which is defined as follows: “An anarthrous participle can be used with a verb of being to form a finite verbal idea. This participle is called periphrastic because it is a *round-about* way of saying what could be expressed by a single verb.”⁸⁶ In this instance, the verb of being (ὧσιν)

⁸³ Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 468–469.

⁸⁴ *LW*, 69:108.

⁸⁵ Pieper, 1:415.

⁸⁶ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 647.

is in the present tense and the participle is in the perfect tense, and therefore the translation should be in the perfect tense (“perfected”).⁸⁷

The unity of the believers continually and already exists; it is not something we bring about. Lenski notes that the force of the periphrastic perfect participle here has the thrust of “brought to the goal of complete oneness and thus continuing there indefinitely.”⁸⁸ It is brought about in the sense that Christ’s Word accomplishes it. Such unity already exists.

It is not brought about in the sense that we accomplish it or that it is accomplished in any other manner. Buls is therefore uncomfortable with many of the English translations for he fears they give the impression that this unity is brought about by our actions. A translation of “may they become one” (or something similar) may lead the reader to think this unity does not already exist and that we must do something to bring it about. He suggests a translation: “May they be perfectly one.”⁸⁹

This reiterates what we saw in verse 11: Christians recognize the unity given through the Word of God. This cannot be understood as a command to “agree to disagree” over teachings in the Word, nor do we create this unity by any actions of ours. Rather, Gary Baumler puts it well when he writes,

True, those who are one through faith in Jesus will seek others who share the faith, and they will join in a visible fellowship based on the confession of faith. Confessional unity comes when believers agree together on the teachings from God’s Word. In this sinful world errors creep in and divisions result, and God warns us to keep all his teachings pure, to hold to Jesus’ teaching. That is the only way to bring us together in one body on earth. Finally, in the glories of heaven all who believe in Jesus as God’s Son and our Savior will be one, a body unified. Jesus’ prayer will have its final answer.⁹⁰

Luther notes that what is ongoing here is not bringing into unity or accomplishing unity, but rather individual Christians being strengthened in their faith. The prayer is not about Christians bringing about unity; it is about the Lord strengthening us in the unity He has created.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 648.

⁸⁸ Lenski, 1162.

⁸⁹ Buls, “Study of John 17:20–26.”

⁹⁰ Gary F. Baumler, *John*, People’s Bible Commentary (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 229–230.

Luther explains:

It is as if He said: “I have one Christendom, which should and shall be one substance, and yet it is wanting in this respect: that many within it are still weak. The one essence is there, but it depends solely on faith, and each one possesses it as his own in proportion to his faith.” Therefore, He prays that they may grow and become stronger in their incipient faith and so become fully, wholly, and entirely one in Christ.⁹¹

The purpose of this unity is that the world should see that the Father sent the Son and should see the Father’s care for His children. Jesus said, “In order that the world should know that You sent Me and You loved them just as You loved Me” (ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας καὶ ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμέ ἠγάπησας). Luther notes the great comfort this offers us: “This is the final result of this knowledge of the Word: that our hearts can say joyfully and without any doubt that we are God’s dear children and have a kind and gracious Father. For it belongs to Christ and His office through His Word to make us altogether certain that we should expect all love and grace from God—the kind of love with which He loved Christ.”⁹²

It is an act of eisegesis when modern day Christians use passages such as these to call for a unity that lacks full agreement in the Word of God. Indeed, they have it backwards. We cannot create unity, the Word does that, but we can harm unity. Lenski warns, “Those who, though they are still believers, in any way deviate from the Word hinder the consummation of the oneness and prevent the fulfillment of Jesus’ last prayer as far as they are concerned.”⁹³

John 17:24–26

²⁴Πάτερ, ὃ δέδωκάς μοι, θέλω ἵνα ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ κάκεινοι ὡσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ, ἵνα θεωρῶσιν τὴν δόξαν τὴν ἐμήν, ἣν δέδωκάς μοι ὅτι ἠγάπησάς με πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.

²⁵πάτερ δίκαιε, καὶ ὁ κόσμος σε οὐκ ἔγνω, ἐγὼ δέ σε ἔγνω, καὶ οὗτοι ἔγνωσαν ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας·

²⁶καὶ ἐγνώρισα αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά σου καὶ γνωρίσω, ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἠγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἦ καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς.

⁹¹ *LW*, 69:110.

⁹² *LW*, 69:111.

⁹³ Lenski, 1163.

Vocabulary

θεωρῶσιν – verb, subjunctive, present, active, 3rd person, plural, from θεωρέω, “look at”

καταβολῆς – noun, genitive, feminine, singular, common, from καταβολή, “foundation”

²⁴Father, the ones whom You have given to Me, I desire that where I am they should be with Me, in order that they should behold My glory, which You have given to Me, because You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵Righteous Father, also the world has not known You, but I have known You, and these have known that You sent Me.

²⁶And I have made known to them Your name, and I will make known, in order that the love with which You loved Me should be in them and I in them (Author’s translation).

²⁴“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may see my glory—the glory you gave me because you loved me before the world’s foundation.

²⁵Righteous Father, the world did not know you, but I knew you, and these men knew that you sent me.

²⁶I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have for me may be in them and that I may be in them” (EHV).

The wondrous comfort of this prayer culminates in these verses. Luther says: “This is the final but most comforting part of this prayer for all those who cling to Christ, so that we may be sure and certain of our ultimate hope, rest, and abode, since here in the world we are miserable, destitute, and have no sure or permanent abiding place.”⁹⁴

Verse 24 focuses upon the glorification of believers in eternity. The use of πρὸ in this verse is the same as in verse 5, and so what was said there applies here as well (we see reference to the eternal nature of God the Son). The Father’s love for Christ is from eternity.

Where is that place “where I am” (ὅπου εἰμι ἐγώ)? Luther says, “That is, in the arms and bosom of the Father, where all angels must hasten to bear and carry us. But it has no name and cannot be pointed out with the finger or depicted; it must be grasped in the Word through faith.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ *LW*, 69:112.

⁹⁵ *LW*, 69:113.

Christ describes the glory of heaven with the words, “They should behold My glory” (ἵνα θεωρῶσιν τὴν δόξαν τὴν ἐμήν). The stress is upon θεωρῶσιν (“watch, look on as a spectator”). This verb is often used in connection with seeing the extraordinary. Lenski writes, “The believers are to see all the wonders of the glory of Jesus with unspeakable delight. The present tense indicates continuous beholding. The glory the believers are to behold is, of course, the one divine glory of his attributes.”⁹⁶

Gerhard writes that eternal life is characterized by “most perfect blessedness” and then explains that “blessedness”: “The essence of blessedness is the very seeing of God and, arising from that sight, the glory of soul and body and therefore the eternal happiness of the blessed.”⁹⁷

Luther explains Jesus’ statement, “Because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (ὅτι ἠγάπησάς με πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου):

“This is the glory they shall see: that I am Your Son—not only that I was sent into the world and was born of the Virgin, but that I am Your only Son from eternity, beloved before the beginning of the world, that I am equally one God with You, born from eternity.” For He can show Him no greater love than by giving Him the same eternal Godhead. This is now proclaimed and believed, though it is still hidden and not visible. Therefore, it must be brought to light and constantly set forth through the Word (as He has been doing) until we shall see it before our eyes without any veil or covering.⁹⁸

The other direct reference to John 17 in the Confessions is also found in the Formula of Concord Solid Declaration. In Article VIII (“The Person of Christ”), the confessors write,

This is what we hold and teach, in conformity with the ancient orthodox Church, as it has explained this teaching from the Scriptures: the human nature in Christ has received this majesty through the personal union. This happened because the entire fullness of the divinity dwells in Christ, not as in other holy men or angels, but bodily, as in its own body. The divinity shines forth with all its majesty, power, glory, and effectiveness in the received human nature. It does this voluntarily when and as Christ wills. In, with, and through the human nature, Christ shows, uses, and acts on His divine power, glory, and efficacy, as the soul does in the body and

⁹⁶ Lenski, 1166.

⁹⁷ Johann Gerhard, cited in Hoenecke, 4:330.

⁹⁸ *LW*, 69:115–116.

fire in glowing iron. (By means of these illustrations, as was also mentioned above, the entire Ancient Church has explained this doctrine.) This power was concealed and withheld at the time of the humiliation. But now, after the form of a servant has been laid aside, it is fully, powerfully, and publicly exercised before all saints, in heaven and on earth. In the life to come we shall also behold His glory face-to-face (John 17:24).⁹⁹

Verses 25 and 26 focus upon the contrast between those who do not know Christ and those who do know Him. Christ's knowledge of the Father results in the believers' knowledge of the Father and the Son. Christ will continue to make known the saving revelation of the Father through the Word.

Yet, the unbelieving world rejects this Word. Luther says:

Therefore, He now concludes by saying: "Dear Father, the world does not know You, nor does it want to know You, even though this is openly preached.... Therefore, You are assuredly doing the right thing by leaving them in their stiff-necked blindness to go to their father, the devil, so that they will see nothing of My glory, neither in the Word and the knowledge of faith nor in the immediate vision of the life to come."¹⁰⁰

"And I have made known to them your name, and I will make known" (καὶ ἐγνώρισα αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά σου καὶ γνῶρισω). Luther paraphrases: "I will not merely make a beginning and leave it at that, but I will continue to teach this very thing through both the Word and the Spirit, so that no one need seek anything different or higher, but should occupy himself solely with comprehending this better and more firmly."¹⁰¹

Next, Luther comments,

For herein lies the power to come to know the Father through faith, so that the heart may stand before Him in good cheer, with a joyful confidence in His favor, not fearing any wrath. And there is surely no more difficult art in heaven and earth. Let no one think that this is something that can be completely learned after hearing it once or twice, as our uncomprehending sophists and conceited spirits imagine.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, FC SD VIII, 64–65.

¹⁰⁰ *LW*, 69:117.

¹⁰¹ *LW*, 69:118.

¹⁰² *LW*, 69:118–119.

Verse 26 contains a rare use of the article. Wallace lists the article here as “kataphoric” and explains it as follows: “A rare use of the article is to point to something in the text that immediately follows. The first mention, with the article, is anticipatory, followed by a phrase or statement that defines or qualifies the thing mentioned.”¹⁰³ Here, Christ explains the love of which He speaks. “In order that *the love with which you loved me* should be in them and I in them” (ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἠγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ᾗ καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς.).

There is truly remarkable comfort for us in this final verse. The love that God has for the believer is the same love which the Father has for the Son. The believer has this love as his constant possession. The safe keeping of the elect in this love was planned in eternity and will reach into eternity. This love is ours in Christ. As Buls summarized, “Jesus says: ‘I am theirs by faith.’”¹⁰⁴

Luther: “What is now said is the very reason on account of which everything is done, namely, that we come to know the Father’s heart and His will (now set forth in the Word and hereafter to be beheld openly in the life to come)—how He loved us and in eternity still loves us through His Son, Jesus Christ, alone.”¹⁰⁵

So concludes the section of the High Priestly Prayer wherein Christ prays for all believers and so concludes the entire prayer. Here we have seen the mystical union, the unity of believers, the glory God gives to us, and the joy of eternal life. What love God has for His children!

Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer is certainly a source of tremendous comfort for the Christian. It speaks to the fact that in Christ we are kept safe, both now and forever. It assures us that Christ ever has our safe keeping in mind. It teaches us that these things are true and unchanging from before the world began.

The High Priestly Prayer also contains many references to various doctrines, some explicit and some implied. In this text, Christ both promises the revelation of the Word to us and reveals much of that Word. That Word is the truth—the saving truth of our God. Luther: “May Christ our Lord uphold and strengthen us in this pure knowledge and unity of faith until the day of His glorious coming. To Him be glory, honor, and praise with God the Father forever. Amen.”¹⁰⁶ LSQ

¹⁰³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 220.

¹⁰⁴ Buls, “Study of John 17:20–26.”

¹⁰⁵ *LW*, 69:119.

¹⁰⁶ *LW*, 69:119.

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Intersections of Doctrine: An Exegesis of Ephesians 2:1–10

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CONNECTIONS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE. IN any electrical work, it is critical to make the right connections with precision. In any construction project, it is critical to put all the pieces together according to schematics. In theology, it is critical to know the relationship that exists between various doctrines. The different relationships connecting our doctrines can make all the difference in the world with regard to the message we preach. After all, it may not be that difficult to hear a sermon or read a book by a non-Lutheran and think that everything there can be understood properly as technically true. Yet the connections and relationships between the teachings presented there can leave us Lutherans with an uneasiness about how it all lines up.¹ An individual doctrine is never in a void. To do justice to God's Word, both the doctrine and its relationship with other doctrines need to be correct.

Paul's succinct outline of the Christian faith in Ephesians 2:1–10 is noteworthy not only for its content but also for the connections he makes between each facet of the faith. He starts with the connection

¹ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1929), 32, expresses a similar train of thought: "When you hear some sectarian preach, you may say, 'What he said was the truth,' and yet you do not feel satisfied. Here is the key for unlocking this mystery: the preacher did not rightly divide Law and Gospel, and hence everything went wrong." Daniel Deutschlander, *The Narrow Lutheran Middle* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2011), 8, emphasizes how biblical truths can be turned into errors when human reason dominates how we relate these truths to one another.

between sin and humanity's natural condition. The result is an understanding of the sinner's total depravity. In connection with this total depravity in mind, we can then have a clear understanding of God's grace and the gift of faith. This leads us to realize that grace is unearned and undeserved, while our regeneration by faith is also from God and not of ourselves. Finally, Paul shows the connection between our regeneration and the Christian's new obedience. In that relationship we find that good works are a necessary result of faith and thus not a cause of salvation. Clear connections give precision to doctrine.

Sin and Total Depravity: Ephesians 2:1–3

1 Καὶ ἡμᾶς² ὄντας νεκροὺς³ τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις⁴ ὑμῶν, 2 ἐν αἷς ποτε περιεπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας· 3 ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιών, καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί.⁵

1 *And you, being dead from your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the jurisdiction of the air, the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience, 3 in which we all also once lived in the desires of our flesh, doing the will of the flesh and mind. We were also by nature children of wrath like the rest.*

² Because Paul repeats the beginning of verse 1 in verse 5 with ἡμᾶς in place of ὑμᾶς, R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 407, is correct to assert, "In this paragraph no distinction is made between former Gentiles and former Jews." Cf. Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible 34 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 212.

³ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 190, describes the predicate accusative construction: "The accusative substantive (or adjective) stands in predicate relation to another accusative substantive. The two will be joined by an equative verb, either an infinitive or participle. Neither type is especially frequent outside of Luke or Paul."

⁴ There is no essential difference between "trespasses" and "sins," and Paul seems to use the two interchangeably. See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 280; Georg Stoeckhardt, *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, trans. Martin Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952), 118; Lenski, 407. Cf. Origen and Jerome, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Ronald Heine (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 120, who assert that trespasses are "the roots and beginnings of sins."

⁵ Barbara Aland et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). All Greek citations in this paper use the NA28.

Spiritual Death

In this section, Paul clearly portrays our natural condition as spiritually dead from sin. Although there is a variety of opinions on the dative τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις, it fits best if categorized as denoting cause, because of its connection with verse 5.⁶ The beginning of verse 5 (καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ) presents similar verbiage to verse 1. Also, the accusative pronoun ἡμᾶς in verse 1 has no nearby main verb to govern it. It is the object of συνεζωοποίησεν from verse 5 as Paul there finishes the thought from which he digressed.⁷ Because verse 5 presents God as the *cause* of our revivification, it makes sense for verse 1 to explain the *cause* of our spiritual death, namely, our trespasses and sins. Martin Luther's translation (*durch Ubertretung und Suende*) also gives trespasses and sins a causal flavor, as do other interpretations from the Lutheran tradition.⁸

The key word of this section is νεκροὺς, “dead.” Spiritually dead is our natural human condition because of sin. Death is a concept where there is no middle ground. A person is either dead or not. Death is also a state of helplessness. The dead person cannot do anything to get out of that condition. This helplessness and lack of any middle ground is critical to understanding our natural human condition. The Formula of Concord latches onto Ephesians 2:1 to oppose the idea that our human nature has any spiritual capabilities or is merely “weak and sick.”⁹ The roadkill on the side of a highway can do nothing.

This state of spiritual death characterizes our condition from birth and even from conception.¹⁰ Although Paul does not explicitly mention

⁶ For the dative of cause see William Goodwin, *A Greek Grammar* (London: MacMillan, 1879), 251 (His first example listed is even for a cause of death.); Wallace, 167.

⁷ See Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 199; F. F. Bruce, 280.

⁸ *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Die Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1906–1961), 7:195 (hereafter cited as WA DB). Aegidius Hunnius, *Commentarius in Epistolam Divi Pauli Apostoli ad Ephesios* (Frankfurt am Main: Spies, 1593), 178: “Thus outside of grace men are confirmed dead in sin, in that they are dead from sin and spiritually ruined by it.” Johannes Brenz, *Kommentar zum Briefe des Apostels Paulus an die Epheser*, ed. Walther Köhler (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1935), 19: “We are dead because of sins.” See also Lenski, 407.

⁹ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), FC, SD, 2:10 (hereafter citations from the *Book of Concord* are from this edition and according to its abbreviations for a confessional document, article, and paragraph numbers).

¹⁰ Ps. 51:5.

the words “birth” or “conception” here, the concept is still present in the all-inclusive words, ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημεν ποτε (“in which we all also once lived”). No matter who we are or when we first believe, we all once lived in this situation for an amount of time. Likewise, the dative φύσει sandwiched between τέκνα and ὀργῆς (“by nature children of wrath”) in verse 3 carries with it the idea, “by birth.”¹¹ Paul’s words present us with a spiritual death that is not just in the experience of some but in the experience of us all from our beginning.

Even though this condition is from birth, Paul also emphasizes the individual’s personal blame for this dead condition and leaves no room for excuses. We see our culpability in the phrases, “your trespasses and sins,” “you once walked according to the course of the world,” and “we all also once lived in the desires of our flesh.” The personal pronouns emphasize our personal participation in the problem. The plural “trespasses” and “sins” as well as the picture of “walking” and “living” this life of sin show our own cooperation and willingness to continue in the path of our nature from birth. We are not innocent “children of wrath” but willing participants deserving such wrath.

Death as a Lifestyle

Paul describes how this sinful natural condition of humanity expresses itself. It involves walking κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου (“according to the eon of this world”), κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος (“according to the ruler of the dominion of air”), and ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς (“in the desires of our flesh, doing the will of the flesh”).

First, what does it mean to “walk according to the eon of this world”? The phrase τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου appears anomalous to commentators because αἰών and κόσμος have similar meanings and are often used interchangeably, making it confusing for them to be formed into such a phrase.¹²

This uncommon use of αἰών and the following parallel phrases dealing with the antagonistic “spirit” lead some to conclude αἰών is being used as a proper noun, signifying a god of Iranian origin whose mystery cult was prominent at least in Alexandria at around 200 B.C. and who later played an important role in some Gnostic ideology.¹³

¹¹ Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 9:252 (hereafter cited as *TDNT*).

¹² Best, 203; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 95.

¹³ F. F. Bruce, 282–283; Best, 203–204.

Hermann Sasse even asserts concerning this verse, “We may perhaps see a penetration into Christian thinking of a mythological conception of syncretism which came to play a most important part in Gnosticism.”¹⁴ This viewpoint, however, would mean Paul is erratically switching from a personified αἰών in verse 2 to a temporal αἰών in verse 7. It would also be the only New Testament instance of such a reference.

The unusual use of αἰών and κόσμος together can be reconciled if the two are used in their more specific senses, that is, if αἰών is understood as primarily temporal and κόσμος as primarily spatial.¹⁵ The κόσμος then refers to the people of the world and αἰών to their activity over time. The result is the concept of walking “according to the course of this world,” or in other words, walking the walk of the unbelieving masses.¹⁶ The spiritual death caused by trespasses and sins, shows itself in its conformity to this sinful world and its path.

Following the course of this world also means following “the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” Paul makes it clear that following one is the same as following the other because this “ruler” is the one pushing along a sinful course for the world by being “at work in the sons of disobedience.” This connection Paul is trying to make between the world and this evil spirit, the devil, are clear enough, but somewhat enigmatic is his characterization that this spirit is “the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” Brenz understands ἄηρ as *spiritus*, and thus the devil is the “ruler of every human spirit or life and holds the whole world’s spirit captive.”¹⁷ Also possible and conveying a similar idea is understanding ἄηρ as “atmosphere,” specifically a figurative spiritual atmosphere around this world and influencing it, all while under the devil’s jurisdiction or dominion (ἐξουσία).¹⁸ Clearly, though, this otherworldly influence adds another dimension to Paul’s picture of the human condition. Not only are humans dead and lost in sin on their own, they are inclined to follow the course of the rest of the sinful world and the will of the devil who also exerts his spiritually destructive influence also on the people of the world.

¹⁴ TDNT, 1:207–208. See also, Origen, 120–121.

¹⁵ See Frederick William Danker, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 32, 561–562 (hereafter cited as BDAG).

¹⁶ Likewise, Luther, WA DB, 7:195, translates, “nach dem lauff dieser Welt.” See also J. P. Koehler, *A Commentary on Galatians and Paul’s Rhapsody in Christ: A Commentary on Ephesians* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2000), 280; Irwin Habek, *Ephesians: Amazing Grace* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1985), 37; Stoeckhardt, 118–119.

¹⁷ Brenz, 19.

¹⁸ Stoeckhardt, 120.

Paul makes it clear he is not just talking about other people out there; he includes himself and all people in this situation by adding, ἐν οἷς καὶ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἀνεστράφημέν ποτε. None are excluded from this horrible lost condition, a condition he characterizes as empty self-gratification (ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ τῶν διανοιῶν). This adds a final personal touch to our natural sinful condition. We ourselves are culpable. We are not mere pawns of the world's ways and the devil's influence; we add to the problem with our own self-gratifying lusts, thoughts, and actions.

Finally, Paul concludes his grim description of the human condition by saying, "We were also by nature children of wrath like the rest." Sin and the sinful nature bring wrath upon themselves. That this condition is "by nature" (φύσει) means it is by birth and inherited.¹⁹ That we are "children" (τέκνα) of wrath likely also alludes to this inherited original sin, although being a "son of" or "child of" something can also be idiomatic for "deserving of."²⁰ Nevertheless, Paul gives the somber conclusion: the natural human condition, because it is utterly filled with sin, has nothing to look forward to but wrath.²¹ Everything Paul describes in these opening verses is a complete picture of the total depravity of our human nature—dead, sinful, following the world, ruled by the devil, self-gratifying, and subject to God's well-deserved wrath.

Working with the Dead

A clear understanding of humanity's natural, total depravity should have a clear impact on how we conduct the ministry and engage others with Jesus. First of all, we know not to underestimate the natural human condition. Apart from God, a person is dead and utterly lost in sin. As we seek to preach the gospel to others, we know there will be opposition and difficulties. We will be disappointed if our outlook on mission work is merely waiting around for unbelievers to drop by and hear us on

¹⁹ Habeck, 38, Stoeckhardt, 123, and Bruce, 284, emphasize Gal. 2:15 for this definition: "We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners."

²⁰ Lenski, 413, emphasizes Paul's use of "children" as a reference to inherited original sin. Bruce, 285, mentions also the other possibility, citing David's response to Nathan's sheep illustration: "The man who has done this is a son of death." Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata*, vol. 2, *Epistolas Apostolicas Universas, et Apocalypsin Johanneam* (Dresden and Leipzig, 1719), 674: "It is like in the Hebrew language where the son of death means being guilty of a capital crime, the son of hell means binding oneself to the punishment of hell (Matt. [23]:15), and the son of perdition means being culpable of one's own perdition (John 17:12)." Best, 211–212, gives a wide range of other possibilities as well.

²¹ See FC, SD, 1:6.

Sunday. Such an attitude is like waiting for the spiritually dead unbelievers to do all the work to hear the gospel. Instead, we are the seekers of the lost, seeking opportunities to use the tools needed to convert, the means of grace.²² Those tools are needed because the spiritually dead will not raise themselves. They need God to raise them up, as Paul makes clear beginning with verse 5. No smiles or sunshine alone will do the trick. All outreach efforts to engage unbelievers with Jesus will have the main goal in mind of conveying God’s Word—his law and gospel.

In our work of preaching the Word, we can also expect to be going against “the course of this world” with its chief backer and despot, the devil. Our doctrines will not be in conformity with the desires of the world and human nature, and we can safely expect that such will never be the case. Yet with the Word we never seek to conform our doctrine to the course of the world, but to conform individuals living according to the course of the world to God’s Word. We can be relieved that such power and work is God’s; he has only called us to bear the Word. We gladly bear that Word to both our congregations and to those in our communities, as we are able.

Total Depravity, Grace, and Faith: Ephesians 2:4–9

4 ὁ δὲ θεὸς²³ πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει,²⁴ διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἠγάπησεν²⁵ ἡμᾶς, 5 καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν²⁶ συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, – χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι — 6 καὶ συνήγειρεν καὶ συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 7 ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις

²² Although I am now emphasizing our work particularly as pastors at this conference, it is not only we who are called to convey the gospel, but as Martin Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971–2018), 5:29, points out, “All Christians have a general call to proclaim the Gospel of God.”

²³ Stoeckhardt, 123: “By having this subject follow the somewhat extended predicate, vv. 1–3, and introducing it with δὲ, the subject is decidedly emphasized. Moreover, in this way the contrast between all that God has done in and upon us and our former corrupt status becomes definitely more impressive.”

²⁴ BDAG, 316: “kindness or concern expressed for someone in need.” Lenski, 414: “‘Mercy’ goes out to the *wretched* and miserable.”

²⁵ Tremper Longman III and David E. Gardland, eds., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 12:67, suggest that “the great love [with] which he loved us” is simply “a kind of Semitic redundancy.”

²⁶ Lenski, 415: “Many punctuate so as to combine: ‘even when we were dead—he quickened us’; but the fact that only dead persons can be vivified is too obvious to be stated. The fact that God loved us while we were yet spiritually dead, that indeed is astounding.”

τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἐν χρηστότητι ἐφ'²⁷ ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. **8** Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· **9** οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι.

4 *But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love for us, 5 even while we were dead because of the trespasses, made us alive with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up and seated us with him in the heavenly places through Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness to us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you are saved through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not from works, so that no one may boast.*

The Great Reversal to Life

Paul contrasts sinful human depravity with God's love to show a vivid picture of all that God's grace entails. Interestingly enough, Paul strains himself grammatically to keep his statements about the Ephesians' former sinful condition prior to his comforting words about the gospel.²⁸ After all, it is all the way in verse 5 that we discover the actual main verb that governs the ὑμᾶς of so long ago in verse 1. Thus there is a grammatical building of tension all the way up to this point.²⁹ Through the whole grim picture of sin and human nature, the reader knows that something more is still coming. Here it is: "God ... made us alive with Christ." This ordering stresses the real connection between sin and grace. Naturally depraved humans are dead and helpless in sin, and so God must do all the work in raising up the spiritually dead. Without realizing the desperate human condition, a sinner will not realize the need for God's grace and mercy.³⁰ Nothing makes God's grace more relevant than the awareness of sin and retribution.

²⁷ BDAG, 366, categorizes this preposition as a "marker of feelings directed toward someone."

²⁸ Jerome, 119, is even bothered enough by the grammar to want to rearrange the first five verses for the purposes of his commentary.

²⁹ Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 296–300, notes the chiasmic structure, which places emphasis on the middle statement: "By grace you have been saved." He likewise mentions the *inclusio*, wherein those who are walking dead in sins in verses 1–2 are now walking in good works by verse 10.

³⁰ Luther also emphasizes this order from Eph. 2: "In the first place, we must know that we are the children of wrath, and all our works, intentions, and thoughts are nothing at all. Here we need a clear, strong text to bear out this point. Such is the saying of St. Paul in Eph. 2 [:3]. Note this well." *Luther's Works: American Edition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton Oswald, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–), 51:71 (hereafter cited as *LW*).

So what has been done about this situation of being dead in trespasses? Paul writes that we have been “made alive” (συνεζωποίησεν), “raised up” (συνήγειρεν), and “seated in the heavenly places” (συνεκάθισεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις). All three of these verbs are in the aorist tense, denoting past events. This participation in the resurrection and heaven are already present realities.³¹ It is unlikely that they would be referring to anything beyond this current life because Paul says all this participation in Christ’s resurrection is “*in order that* in the coming ages he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace” (ἵνα ἐνδείξηται ἐν τοῖς αἰώσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις τὸ ὑπερβάλλον πλοῦτος τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ). Thus, there is a difference between the present/past vivification with its heavenly session and what happens in “the coming ages.”

Being made alive, raised up, and seated in the heavenly places begins with faith, because this faith connects us intimately with Christ.³² Paul writes about this connection just prior to these verses in 1:22–23, “And God subordinated all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body.” If the church, namely the sum of believers, is Christ’s body, then it is quite fitting for Paul to present a current participation in Christ’s resurrection and glory in heavenly places for believers.³³ What then would it mean for us to be currently participating in the resurrection and heaven? The simplest understanding is probably the best here, that is, through faith we have a relationship with God, a closeness, even at the present. Because this closeness with God is what makes heaven so great, we have to some extent a realization of this resurrection to heaven already through faith (consider also Rom. 6:1–11). Luther understands this verse in a similar way: “We are truly in the kingdom of Christ, yet, as it were, in a mystery. Paul often follows this line. God has ‘raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 2:6).”³⁴ Through faith, our relationship with God, we already participate in the heavenly experience to some extent.

³¹ Origen, 126, acknowledges but rejects the “simple” interpretation that the past tense alludes to “God’s foreknowledge and predetermination, as though what will be has already occurred.”

³² This intimate connection with Christ is on the basis of the preposition σύν (συνεζωποίησεν, συνήγειρεν, and συνεκάθισεν) in verses 5–6 connected with the dative τῷ Χριστῷ and not on the basis of ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, which I will argue later is not being used to denote association but rather means.

³³ Phil. 3:20, “Our citizenship is in heaven,” and the past tenses in Rom. 3:30, “Those he justified, he also glorified,” emphasize a similar heavenly participation already.

³⁴ *LW*, 17:387, 15:60.

Even though we already have been raised up and seated with Christ in heaven, this all is a foretaste of what is to come. Paul tells us there is something even greater ahead when he writes that all this is “in order that in the coming ages he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Far surpassing (ὑπερβάλλον) riches of his grace await in the future, and precisely because these riches far surpass any measurement, it escapes full human expression.³⁵ Thus although we participate in the heavenly places already to some extent, after this life there will be indescribable joy as we experience our full closeness with God without any sin interfering whatsoever.

The Cause of Life: Grace

Having described this great reversal of spiritual death into spiritual life, the critical question becomes, “What is the cause of this reversal?” The definition of grace (χάρις) in particular here determines everything. Grace (χάρις) is perhaps one of the most common yet debated words in Christianity, and volumes more could be written on the word alone.³⁶ Obviously, the meaning of this entire section would vary based on whether one understands grace as a favorable disposition or gifts of renewal (an infusion of grace). Grace as gifts of renewal mixes God’s work with human work, and even if it grants that God is the ultimate source of salvation, it still includes human participation and cooperation along the way.³⁷ Grace, as it is used in Scripture, is primarily a favorable attitude or disposition and occasionally by way of metonymy used to mean gifts of grace but is only used in the latter way for matters not pertaining to salvation.³⁸ Understanding grace as a favorable disposition

³⁵ BDAG, 1032, describes ὑπερβάλλω as attaining “a degree that extraordinarily exceeds a point on a scale of extent.”

³⁶ Consider even how the texts of both Melancthon and Chemnitz in the *Loci Theologici*, 8:955–979, go into great detail about the word and its history.

³⁷ See Peter S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 67.

³⁸ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950–1957), 2:9. Chemnitz, 8:977: “Gifts, such as the Spirit of renewal, follow after this acceptance by God, and thus these two matters cannot be torn apart.... Therefore we are not rejecting gifts of renewal.... But we do distinguish between these two, and attribute to each the place which Scripture assigns to it, that is to say, to the article of justification the mercy of God, but to the article of renewal the gifts of newness.” See also Chemnitz, 1:494. Some important Scripture passages used to prove grace (χάρις) means a favorable disposition include Rom. 3:24, 4:4, 4:16, 5:20, 6:14, 11:6, Eph. 2:5–9, and 2 Tim. 1:9. Some Scripture passages where grace is used by metonymy to mean gifts of grace include Rom. 15:15–16, 1 Pet. 2:19, and 1 Pet. 4:10–11.

also makes grace essentially a synonym with the forgiveness of sins and justification.³⁹

With the way that Paul describes and qualifies grace in this section, we have more than enough information to define his use of grace here as a favorable attitude. First, in connection with the total depravity and spiritual death that Paul establishes, it would make no sense for something dead to receive gifts of renewal, self-help, and self-resurrection, all the more when Paul makes it clear this resurrection comes from God and “because of his great love for us.” Because death involves helplessness, the solution must be unilaterally from an outside source and devoid of cooperation. Second, it would be redundant for Paul to say, “In order that in the coming ages he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness (χρηστότητι) to us,” if grace is not a disposition but a gift. Gifts need no demonstration because they are the demonstration of a favorable attitude. Third, all of salvation by grace through faith is described as “the gift of God,” so grace in itself here is not the gift but the cause of the gift of salvation. Finally, this gift of salvation is described as “not from works, so that no one may boast.” Paul could not write this if good works resulting from gifts of renewal contributed to salvation in any way. With all these little connections Paul gives to describe grace, it becomes clear that grace is an attitude of God’s love and favor toward us that is unearned, undeserved, and involves no works of human cooperation.

Grace Exists through Christ and Comes through Faith

Paul further establishes the means and instrument by which God has accomplished this great reversal from death to life (v. 6), final salvation (v. 7), and recreation (v. 10), when he uses the phrase “in Christ Jesus” (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). The preposition ἐν, the most common preposition in the New Testament, is also about as multifaceted as its common English translation, “in.”⁴⁰ Since the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ is precisely repeated three times in such a short space, the preposition is most likely used in the same sense. For many commentators the ἐν denotes close association, making the ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ mean, “in connection with

³⁹ Melancthon’s text in Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 8:956: “Therefore let this be the definition of ‘grace’: Grace is the remission of sins or the mercy promised for the sake of Christ, or the free acceptance which necessarily accompany the giving of the Holy Spirit.” Ap., 4:76: “To obtain the forgiveness of sins is to be justified according to [Ps. 32:1]: ‘Blessed are those whose transgression is forgiven.’”

⁴⁰ Wallace, 372, 375.

Christ Jesus” or “in union, in vital connection with Christ Jesus.”⁴¹ The problem with this view is that the σύν connected to verbs in verse 5 and 6 already establishes that this being raised up and seated is in connection with Christ. The ἐν would be redundant in that case if it also was used in a similar sense. Also this view of ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ would make the connection vary between uses of ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, because our connection with Christ’s resurrection (verse 6) would have to be a far different connection with Christ in being created (verse 10), since the Son is uncreated and needed no spiritual recreation. Understanding the ἐν as causal would likewise be inadequate because a cause has already been given in the rich mercy God has because of his great love (verse 4). Therefore because ἐν as close association or cause would not fit with all three instances of ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, neither appears to be accurate. The preposition understood as indicating means, however, adds another connection and dimension to this entire discussion. It then shows how this great reversal from death to life, the demonstration of surpassing riches of grace, and creation for good works are all accomplished—through all of Christ’s work (his perfect life, death on the cross, resurrection, etc.).⁴² God’s great love accomplishes everything here through Christ Jesus.

In God’s love, he had mercy on our dead condition and saved us by his grace, which existed through Christ’s work. This grace then comes to us through faith.⁴³ Paper money is certainly valuable in itself but unless a person has faith that it is valuable to purchase something, it will have no value or use for that individual and remain mere paper. Likewise God’s grace, even with all its richness, accomplishes nothing for the individual without faith. Yet to avoid making this faith appear to

⁴¹ Lenski, 420, 426. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 178–179, suggests a preference for “in union” but states that “through” would be just as theologically correct with the conclusion that “it may be unnecessary to choose between these alternatives. Best, 222–223, suggests that the use of ἐν in verse 6 refers to the “place’ where God acts for us” whereas the σύν “supplies the sense of fellowship with Christ.” This view, however, misses the point that we are not physically in the place of the ἐπιουράνιους, making such a reference to place irrelevant. We are only there in the sense that we are connected with Christ Jesus, but that concept is already covered with the σύν. See also Bruce, 287.

⁴² Calov, 2:677, likewise says that “in Christ Jesus” means *per et propter Christum*. Hunnius, 193, also expresses this same view when he writes, “in Christ Jesus’ denotes the meritorious cause of the complete kindness, Jesus Christ, which he has acquired by his complete obedience and passion for us.”

⁴³ The γάρ beginning verse 8 is being used as a “marker of clarification,” and thus it is fitting to find this simple summarizing formula of being saved by grace through faith. See BDAG, 189.

be a human accomplishment, Paul clarifies further by writing, “And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not from works, so that no one may boast.” The *τοῦτο* refers to the entire concept of being saved by grace through faith and not specifically to either grace or faith, because of its non-matching neuter gender.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, because the entire package is not of works, each constituent part must not be of works. If anything is worthy of boasting it is from God. Thus grace is entirely free and undeserved through Christ’s work, and the faith to receive that grace is also worked in us by God.⁴⁵

The Detailed but Simple Solution

Paul has made the problem clear; he also makes the solution clear. Understanding the proper connections between our sinful state, grace, Christ’s work, and faith makes it clear that God does everything. Because of our sinful state, we are unable to do anything to help ourselves and need grace. Because grace is an attitude not an infusion, we see that it really is free and not mixed with works. Yet because grace exists through Christ’s work, we see that grace did cost something, but someone else paid it. Because grace is ours through faith worked in us but not by us, we see that the whole package is accomplished and orchestrated by God alone. Sometimes doctrine can sound complicated with confusing, albeit often necessary, terminology, but when we break it down and put all these vital connections together, we see a clear, simple picture summarized in *οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων*—not of works.

⁴⁴ Calov, 2:677, asserts *καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον* “does not refer to faith, although this too is a gift of God (Phil. 1:29), but to salvation.” See also Habeck, 43.

⁴⁵ Fitting is the anecdote of Lenski, 422–423, concerning the origin of faith: “Now the simple fact is that even in human relations faith and confidence is produced in us by others, by what they are and what they do; we never up and produce it ourselves. Even deceivers know that they must cunningly make their deceptions of such a nature that they may appear true and grand, and that thus they may produce faith in those whom they wish to deceive. Give up the fiction of a self-produced faith; faith is wrought in us.”

The Relationship between Grace through Faith and Works: Ephesians 2:10

10 αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ⁴⁶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς οἷς⁴⁷ προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν.

10 *For we are his work, created through Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared in advance in order that we might walk in them.*

Good Works Are Only a Result

Having denied works any role in our salvation, Paul clarifies the true role of good works. The γάρ, as in verse 8, is a “marker of clarification.”⁴⁸ In verse 8, the γάρ clarified and summarized the whole section up to that point by saying we are saved by grace through faith apart from works. Now the γάρ clarifies further the role of works.

First, he establishes once again that we are not what we are by our work, but instead we are God’s work, created through Christ Jesus (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).⁴⁹ Anything good about us is only there by God’s work by grace through faith.⁵⁰ This starting point also would mean that even the good works he describes later in the verse would not be to our credit or boasting.⁵¹

Then Paul explains that God is the one who has prepared these good works for us in advance (οἷς προητοίμασεν ὁ θεός). Good works do not prepare us for our relationship with God; they are prepared for us as a result of our relationship with God. This special preparation for works after regeneration makes it all the more clear that “good works must be completely excluded from any questions of salvation as well as from the article on our justification before God.”⁵²

⁴⁶ BDAG, 366, categorizes this preposition as a “marker of object or purpose.”

⁴⁷ This relative pronoun has probably been attracted into the dative case. Although Luther, WA DB, 7:197, translates, “zu welchen Gott uns zuvor bereitet hat, das wir darinnen wandeln sollen,” the omission of ἡμᾶς makes such an interpretation unlikely. See Stoeckhardt, 129; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 348.

⁴⁸ See BDAG, 189.

⁴⁹ See above for an explanation concerning this translation of ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

⁵⁰ Paul’s use of κτισθέντες may well emphasize pure grace in that we are God’s creation spiritually out of nothing good preexisting in ourselves to aid us, just as our physical creation is out of nothing. See Lenski, 425–426. Habec, 43, also summarizes, “Creation rules out cooperation completely.”

⁵¹ Likewise, Luke 17:7–10 gives another picture of good works done without boasting: “We are unworthy servants; we were obligated to do that which we have done.”

⁵² Ep., 4:7.

On the other hand, the fact that these works are prepared in advance for us to “walk in them” should equally iterate that when discussing good works, “the words ‘necessary,’ ‘should,’ and ‘must’ are used correctly, in Christian fashion, also in regard to the reborn; in no way is such use contrary to the pattern of sound words and speech.”⁵³ Good works do not contribute to salvation, but they are necessary results of salvation by grace through faith. At the same time, the placement of verse 10 dealing with good works is not accidental after Paul’s wonderful explanation of our salvation. In view of and motivated by the riches of God’s grace and mercy that we have already received, we strive to walk the path of good works he has prepared in advance for us.

The Third Use of the Law and Good Works

If good works have been prepared in advance for us to do and if they naturally result from our regeneration by God, is it still necessary to preach the so-called third use of the law?⁵⁴ The necessity of preaching the third use of the law has been debated throughout Lutheran history, and it may not be too far off to assert, “The third use of the Law is the doctrinal Achilles’ heel of Lutheranism.”⁵⁵

The interpretation of Ephesians 2:10 then becomes critical in this debate. The fact that good works are prepared in advance can sound at first as if it should not be necessary to urge works because they will naturally and spontaneously happen as God has planned. This emphasis on naturally occurring, spontaneous good works was a vehicle for antinomianism already in sixteenth-century Lutheranism.⁵⁶ The Formula of Concord rightfully opposes Lutheran theologians at the time who were against using the law in any way concerning good works; the opponents asserted, for example, “Just as the sun completes its normal course without needing any force to drive it, the reborn do spontaneously what God demands of them through the prompting and impulse of the

⁵³ Ep., 4:9.

⁵⁴ A straightforward description of this use is Chemnitz, 5:56: “That the Law, written by the finger of God, might be for the reborn a sure norm and rule, showing which works God has prepared, in which He wants the reborn to walk and serve him. Dt 12:32; Eze 20:19; Ro 13:8; Cl 2:20–23.”

⁵⁵ Scott R. Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 121.

⁵⁶ Another main vehicle for antinomianism is the formula, “The law always accuses,” which admittedly is in Ap., 4:38, 128. Werner Elert pressed this formula to promote antinomianism in the twentieth century, Murray, 27. A correct old man, new man anthropology for the regenerate is the key to properly interpreting the phrase.

Holy Spirit.”⁵⁷ The emphasis on spontaneity apart from preaching the third use of the law can sound proper since the Formula of Concord elsewhere even quotes this famous Luther passage:

Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1[:12–13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them.⁵⁸

Such a quote, emphasizing spontaneous and natural good works, can make it sound like preaching new obedience is unnecessary. Yet the key to understanding the Luther quote and a proper understanding of spontaneity with good works is that the subject is “faith” not the Christian as a whole who is not only a new man of faith but also still has a sinful nature.⁵⁹ In addition, it is correct that Christians will do good works spontaneously (i.e., as the opportunities come up), but such spontaneity and preaching the third use of the law are not mutually exclusive.

Even though Ephesians 2:10 stresses that these good works are prepared in advance, it does not mitigate the necessity to preach good works and use the third use of the law. That the good works are prepared in advance is only half of the equation. Paul adds the purpose clause, “in order that we might walk in them.” Thus there is a certain level of participation on our part in these good works, and we are not mere robots doing preprogramed work.⁶⁰ Because this purpose may not

⁵⁷ FC, SD, 6:2.

⁵⁸ *LW*, 35:370. It is also cited in FC, SD, 4:10–11.

⁵⁹ For a thorough treatment proving Luther consistently taught the third use of the law see Edward Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law: Luther's Use of the Law for the Christian Life* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011).

⁶⁰ FC, SD, 2:65–66, describes this human participation and its very limited extent: “It follows from this, as has been said, that as soon as the Holy Spirit has begun his work of rebirth and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that on the basis of his power we can and should be cooperating with him, though still in great weakness. This occurs not on the basis of our fleshly, natural powers but on the basis of the new powers and gifts which the Holy Spirit initiated in us in conversion, as St. Paul specifically and earnestly admonished, that ‘as we work together with’ the Holy Spirit ‘we urge you not to accept the grace of God in vain’ [2 Cor. 6:1]. This should be understood in no other way than that the converted do good to the extent that God rules, leads, and guides them with his Holy Spirit. If God would withdraw his gracious

always be the result, the passage does not mean preaching good works is unnecessary due to their preparation in advance. Instead, the works being prepared in advance comforts us that we will not have to change our lives drastically or go on a far-fetched hunt to find good works to do. They will be right in front of us and in our vocations, as God has prepared.

Can the Third Use of the Law Follow the Gospel?

If we are to preach the third use of the law, the next challenge as pastors is determining how and where we preach it. Modern Evangelicalism in an effort to be more relevant places a dominant emphasis on applying Christianity to daily life, leading to a stress on sanctification over justification.⁶¹ Their improper use and overemphasis on the third use of the law should not, however, plunge us into the extreme of antinomianism in our preaching.

If done correctly, preaching that includes the third use of the law does not diminish or undermine the gospel that was previously spoken. First, we have an excellent example in Ephesians 2:1–10, where Paul follows up his explanation of grace through faith by saying we are created for good works. Verse 10 does not negate the gospel comfort previously spoken. The second half of the Epistle to the Ephesians also urges good works after the gospel has been presented.⁶² Luther himself was also no stranger to the third use of the law and using it after the gospel.⁶³ He even had “admonitions or exhortations delivered from the pulpit after the sermon proper—a long-standing practice of Luther’s, though not all of the scribes who recorded his sermons took notes on the admonitions as well.”⁶⁴ Thus preaching the third use of the law does not negate or confuse the gospel, but can be appropriate to use in *some* sermons as called for by the given text or situation. Out of concern for bruised consciences, however, it is still wise for a pastor to follow up a

hand from such people, they could not for one moment remain obedient to God. If this passage were to be understood as if the converted person cooperates alongside the Holy Spirit, in the way two horses draw a wagon together, this interpretation could not be tolerated without damaging the divine truth.”

⁶¹ For a basic treatment of the Evangelical stress on sanctification, see Harold Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1989). On page 13 he asserts, “Evangelicals present their greatest challenge to Lutheran theology in the area of sanctification.”

⁶² In particular, see Eph. 4:1–6:9.

⁶³ That Luther taught and used the third use of the law, see Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*.

⁶⁴ *LW*, 58:xix; for examples, see also *LW*, 58:xixn25.

treatment of Christian works with a gospel reminder and comfort in our inadequacies.

Conclusion

In Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul briefly connects various doctrinal dots in order to present a full picture of our relationship with God. A clear understanding of sin and spiritual anthropology, of grace and Christ, and of faith and good works are all necessary truths that together present us with the reality that we are saved entirely by God's work. Our condition is helplessness in sin and spiritual death. This condition is reversed by God's favorable attitude of grace and forgiveness, which is a result of Christ's work. This grace that exists through Christ then comes to us by faith, which is also from God. Finally, the regeneration of faith leads us to do subsequent good works—a result and not a cause of our salvation. When viewing prized works of art in a museum, a person can easily see beauty even in the subtleties of individual strokes of the brush. At the same time, the greater beauty is in the entire painting, the sum and interconnection of every skillful brushstroke. Likewise, as much as we enjoy the subtleties of the individual doctrines of God's Word, we see an even greater picture as we view the sum and connection of all these doctrines into one beautiful portrait—a portrait of heaven itself for us by God's free grace. ^{LSQ}

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Basic Rules for Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching

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MAY I BEGIN BY BORROWING A PHRASE FROM the annual presentation in our nation’s capitol: *The state of preaching among us is strong.*

The sermons I hear regularly in my church, those I hear at conferences, even the sermons of our recent seminary graduates are effective, sometimes even masterful presentations of God’s Law and especially His Gospel message.

It is good to dwell for a while on preaching. While matters doctrinal, practical, and historical are undeniably important, no minutes serve so centrally in our pastoral calling as those every Sunday morning (and other times) in which we engage the flock entrusted to our care with a thoughtful, scriptural, personally-applied message from God’s Word.

Our Confessions recognize this: “There is nothing that so attaches people to the church as good preaching.”¹ The same thought is echoed today by observers like Phil Cooke who, pressing his pet topic, branding, stresses the role of the pastor as leader; he is “the identity of the brand, the one who makes the emotional connections needed for loyalty.... People will feel more connection to the pastor than to a building or a program,” he says, adding, the pastor/leader is always a good preacher.²

¹ Concordia *Triglott* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 401–402 (Ap XXIV, 51).

² Phil Cooke, *Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 91.

Do you remember when every pastor's conference among us included a "sermon critique"? For those who don't, let me explain that a time slot during every conference featured one of the pastors presenting one of his actual sermons—sometimes live, sometimes on audio tape—and another would critique it in front of the preacher and assembly. I'm not sure when or why that regular conference feature disappeared.

My assigned topic, "The Basic Rules for Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching," divides neatly into two questions: What are the basic rules for rhetoric, and how do we apply them to the art of preaching?

Part One: Sources of the Rhetorical Art

First, then, we look into the history of rhetorical thought to find there sources for some "basic rules for rhetoric."

For our purposes understand rhetoric to be the art of effective discourse, first oral then written. Rhetoric provides descriptions of speech that accomplishes an intended purpose, and derives principles, suggestions, "rules" by which a speaker can design discourse so it is more likely to produce the effect upon listeners that the speaker desires.

It is impossible to summarize two-and-a-half millennia of thought and study in a few minutes, but let me pick out a few items that we might consider relevant to our preaching art from each of the three great historical flourishings of rhetorical discovery—the classical (Greek and Roman), the eighteenth century British, and the twentieth century American. Together, the study of these periods formed the foundation of my own teaching throughout my career.

Classical Period

Steven L. Reagles, assigned to provide "Insights from Classical Rhetoric for Our Preaching" in this conference thirty-three years ago, traced how the church maintained its skepticism of this product of pagan learning, even while embracing its directives. In the last part of his paper he searches for a "baptized classical rhetoric, captive to Christ and sanctified for the sake of the Gospel."³ I draw heavily on that summary here.

Insights from Isocrates (Greek 436–338 BC):⁴ Natural ability is important, but practice and study can improve even seasoned speakers.

³ "Classical Rhetoric And Our Preaching: Formalization, Anathematization, Utilization" (paper presented at the General Conference of the Pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, September 24, 1986), 7.

⁴ Especially the *Antidosis*. Note this is not "Socrates."

Study the eloquent speakers of your day. Learn everything you can in every field of knowledge. The liberal arts will serve your speaking needs as no “techniques” can.

Insights from Plato (Greek 429?–348? BC):⁵ Truth must always govern style. Speakers must define and clarify abstract terms, and state themes clearly. Anticipate and deal with objections of the audience. Apply truths to the lives of hearers. Finally make sure your discourse has a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Insights from Aristotle (Greek 384–322 BC):⁶ Have cogent well-examined arguments. Structure your speech to build to a climax. Be clear, use concrete, not abstract words. Don’t become so subject-centered that you forget your audience. Adapt your presentation to them, considering their emotional needs, biases, and opinions. Paint word pictures capturing sounds, smells, tastes, sights, and feelings. Your own character might be the most persuasive aspect of your speech.

Insights from Cicero (Roman 106–43 B.C.):⁷ Discovering good material to use is worth major effort. Attend to structure, which helps hearers remember and speakers memorize.

Insights from Quintilian (Roman A.D. 35–96):⁸ Guard your life closely. An orator should be a good man speaking well. And read!—read the best writers of your time.

British Period

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries several Scottish and Irish clergymen, by their callings interested in the persuasive power of speech, became students of rhetoric, applying enlightenment views of human nature and psychology to their understanding of audiences. A century before, Sir Francis Bacon had proposed a model of mental faculties functioning in individual consciousness.⁹ Four “faculties of the mind” emerged as most prominent: intellect (reason), imagination, emotion (passion), and will. Rhetoric became a study of how to engage these mental faculties in order to persuade. Experience led them to

⁵ Especially the *Phaedrus*.

⁶ While heeding Luther’s warning in the Heidelberg Disputation that “If one wishes without danger to philosophize using Aristotle, it is necessary that one first become thoroughly foolish in Christ.” Christian preaching has long drawn on his *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*.

⁷ Especially *De Oratore* and *De Inventione*.

⁸ *Institutio Oratoria*.

⁹ *Advancement of Learning* (1605), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5500/5500-h/5500-h.htm>.

believe that, while logic could inform the reason, rhetoric was necessary to rouse the will to action.

Here are key insights from three prominent representatives of this fruitful period.

George Campbell (1719–1796) *Scottish minister*¹⁰

Deeply revering the classics, Campbell believed that his insights into human nature would deepen appreciation of Quintilian. He classified audience needs into four categories corresponding to psychological faculties, and suggested a sequence for presenting ideas persuasively:

- Understanding: Elucidating a subject by explanation and proof
- Imagination: Exciting admiration by style, detail, and sublimity
- Passions: Involving and motivating
- Will: Moving to action by combining argument with vivacity¹¹

Accordingly, the speaker first has an idea, located in the intellect. By an act of imagination, the idea finds expression in suitable words, which stimulate an audience response as an emotion, finally inclining the listener to will the behavior the speaker intends. A number of 20th century Homiletics texts still employ these categories, particularly intellect, emotion, and will.¹²

Hugh Blair (1718–1800) *Scottish minister*¹³

Blair explored style, broadly considered; the way one speaks, he claimed, reflects the way one thinks, and in turn who one is. He promoted perspicuity (clarity) as of highest importance; without it, all is lost. If one cannot explain an idea clearly, he probably does not understand it himself. (He anticipated Strunk and White by two centuries.¹⁴) Blair developed ideals of integrity and good taste in speaking, values much under attack in today's public sphere.

¹⁰ *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter IV.

¹² Norman A. Madson, Sr., abjured these faculties as he seemed to reject the relevance of "rhetoric" to the work of preaching: "But God's Word does not operate in a natural way, which would mean that it appeals to man's reason; nor does it operate through what we call rhetorical eloquence, appealing to men's emotions. No, it operates in a supernatural way." Norman A. Madson, Sr. "The Power of the Word," 1952, quoted in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (1982): 45–60, quoted in Reagles, *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³ *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783).

¹⁴ William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: MacMillan, 1959).

Richard Whately (1787–1863) *Irish*¹⁵

In his early writing, Whately attacked Hume and others who by the stringent application of logic to the Bible were denying the historicity of Scripture. Whately demonstrated that the same methods they used to cast doubt on the miracles would also leave the existence of Napoleon open to question. He wrote this in 1819; Napoleon died in 1821. Whately extended understandings of Aristotelian logic with greater depth in aspects like testimony, presumption, and burden of proof, concepts still at the center of academic debate and legal discourse. Whately can be very useful to us as we experience a renaissance of Apologetics.

This stimulating period of British rhetorical theorizing was ended in the late 1800s by the emergence of the elocutionary movement, which focused almost exclusively on delivery and turned rhetoric into the practice of extravagant dramatic movement and gestures. This elocutionary concept of “speech training” prompted the faculty of Northwestern College, in the 1950s, to deny our request to introduce a “speech class,” claiming it would make preaching “artificial” and not “natural.” They were unaware of the third great flowering of Western Rhetoric, which was flourishing in the United States since earlier that century.

American Period

The renewal of rhetorical studies in the twentieth century began in 1914 when seventeen members of the National Council of Teachers of English, who inhabited a “Public Speaking Section” inside that body, decided to found a separate professional association called “The National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking” (NAATPS).¹⁶ These pioneers began by studying rhetoric as part of the history of ideas, applying it first to historical instances of speechmaking, but setting the stage for expanding rhetorical studies beyond theories of persuasion to understandings of how all language functions in knowing and even in being.

Among many that could be mentioned, some names stand out.

¹⁵ *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828).

¹⁶ William Keith, “On the Origins of Speech as a Discipline: James A. Winans and Public Speaking as Practical Democracy,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (July 2008). By the time I joined this organization in 1961, it had become the “Speech Association of America” (SAA), and reflecting the broadening focus of its influence, today it is known as the “National Communication Association” (NCA).

James A. Winans (1872–1956) and **Herbert A. Wichelns** (1894–1973), both at Cornell, called the origin meeting in 1914. Wichelns led students to look deeper into speeches, past their performance qualities to focus on communicative aspects.¹⁷ Cornell turned students into rhetorical scholars who flooded to schools nation-wide, an important strain of them to the Mid-West, from Illinois to Iowa and then to Wisconsin.

Karl Wallace (1898–1976), University of Illinois, emphasized substance and ideas as primary in rhetorical studies. Reflecting Quintilian, he considered the “rhetorical man” an ethically grounded person.

Marie Hochmuth Nichols (1908–1978), University of Illinois, introduced and interpreted world scholars, such as the Canadian Kenneth Burke and the British I. A. Richards, to the American scholarly audience. So began the incorporation into rhetorical studies of many other thinkers, some of whom were surprised to hear that rhetoric was what they were doing.¹⁸

A. Craig Baird (teaching 1928–52), **Donald C. Bryant** (b. 1905), and **Douglas Ehninger** (1913–1979) centered rhetorical studies at the University of Iowa for many years. Baird co-authored the textbook that led a generation in rhetorical criticism;¹⁹ Bryant’s article “Rhetoric: Its Functions and Scope” contained the oft-cited definition of rhetoric as “Adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas” (re-emphasizing the importance of knowing your audience);²⁰ and Ehninger was capable of viewing rhetoric as broadly as the history of ideas, and as narrowly as distilling Whately’s views of logic down to the basic elements and rules of debate.

At the University of Minnesota, **Karlyn Kohrs Campbell** (b. 1937) focused on criticism of presidential rhetoric, observing (well before today’s illustration of it) that “the presidency is defined by what the president says and how they say it.”²¹

¹⁷ Herbert August Wichelns, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory,” in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James Albert Winans*, ed. A. M. Drummond (New York: Century Company, 1925).

¹⁸ Recent graduates of Bethany College and Seminary will recall reading about Neil Postman, Ernesto Grassi, Chaim Perelman, Steven Toulmin, Richard Weaver, Jürgen Habermas, and many others.

¹⁹ Lester Thonssen, A. Craig Baird, and Waldo W. Braden, *Speech Criticism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1970).

²⁰ Donald C. Bryant, “Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39, no. 4 (1953): 401–424, doi:10.1080/00335635309381908.

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karlyn_Kohrs_Campbell.

After studying at Illinois and then Iowa, **Lloyd F. Bitzer** (1931–2016), along with colleagues **Edwin Black** and **Lawrence Rosenfield**, brought the center of rhetorical studies to the University of Wisconsin, where they vastly expanded ways of understanding rhetorical discourse into genre, analog, mythic, phenomenological, metaphoric, archetypal, stylistic, dramatic, phantasy-theme, model, structuralist, feminist, semiotic, and media ecology studies, among still others. One source claims that Bitzer’s classic 1968 essay, “The Rhetorical Situation,”²² was “arguably the single most influential piece by a rhetorical scholar in the communication discipline during the second half of the twentieth century.”²³ Both Steve Reagles and I had the privilege of studying under Dr. Bitzer, and Bethany Lutheran College hosted him as a visiting lecturer in 2001, part of the celebration of our first Baccalaureate class, when he spoke on the topic, “Is God a Rhetor?”

These three great periods of rhetorical study furnished the substance of my nearly sixty years of teaching rhetoric and public speaking. From them emerge the “rules of rhetoric” that I taught and coached, and that inform the following applications to our preaching, which I hope will prompt some spirited discussion when time allows.

Part Two: Some Practices, Trends and Advice²⁴

I will be classical enough to follow the traditional “canons of rhetoric,” explored by the Greeks and formalized by the Romans. To be an effective rhetor, they said, one must be skilled in these proficiencies: *inventio* (invention: discovery of ideas that impact listeners); *dispositio* (organization: structuring ideas); *elocutio* (style: formulating ideas into expression); *memoria* (memory: developing a storehouse of knowledge, and speaking without notes); and *pronuntiatio/actio* (delivery: how one looks and sounds while speaking).

1. Invention

Certainly sermon preparation demands careful attention to scriptural texts. Rhetorical theory through the millennia insists that equal attention be given to audience. Ideas in the sermon should be chosen with the particular audience in mind.

²² *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1 (1968): 1–15.

²³ <https://commarts.wisc.edu/about/news/2016/12/01/lloyd-f-bitzer-1931-2016-memorial>.

²⁴ My plea: do not consider it a criticism if your practice differs from what I suggest; you know yourself and your audience in ways that I do not. My intent is to prompt thinking and discussion.

When I first taught Bethany students in 1962 how to build a speech, I emphasized the “seven lamps of speech preparation.” Note how nearly every one embraces the audience:

1. choose a definite audience response you desire,
2. consider the audience’s characteristics,
3. phrase the demand for the desired response into an impelling proposition,
4. support this proposition by selecting main heads which touch off the springs of response in your audience,
5. arrange these heads into the most effective order for the audience,
6. develop each main head according to the attitude of the audience, and lastly,
7. express your thoughts in the most effective possible style.

Knowing the audience is essential for adapting to it. As students began preparing a speech, I urged them to conduct an “audience analysis,” assisted by a page-long checklist of audience characteristics to take into account—age(s), occupations, levels of education, interests, values and associations. Seminary sermons—I told students there—crafted for a generic ELS congregation audience, can be good, but their sermons won’t be maximally effective until they have been in their parish for a couple years and have grown to know their flock well. And knowing the flock well comes from visiting and listening to them.

Then came the most important step in the speech-preparation process: specify the precise audience response you were aiming for. Remember the old saw, “If you aim at nothing, you are likely to hit it.” Determine, when the sermon is over, precisely in what way do you hope and plan your listeners will be changed?

Augustine adopted Cicero’s three types of oratorical purpose: to teach, to delight, to move.²⁵ I supplied students with a simple but comprehensive list of audience responses from which to choose, and corresponding speech types to achieve them:

- Speech to *entertain*—audience response: “I am interested.” (simply paying attention)
- Speech to *inform*—audience response: “Now I understand.” (clarity)
- Speech to *convince*—audience response: “Now I agree.” (intellectual response)

²⁵ Reagles, *Ibid.*, 9, cites Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (Indianapolis and New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1958).

- Speech to *stimulate*—audience response: “I am moved.” (emotional response)
- Speech to *actuate*—audience response: “I will do that!” (behavior change)

Often choosing an audience response is a matter of deciding how far down this list to go; for example, to achieve the ultimate “actuate” response you will probably have to achieve all the other steps on the way (get interest, clarify, convince, and move). Is there value in including, early in the preparation of every sermon, this question: Just how is it I want my listeners to respond to my sermon this time? “If you aim at nothing, you are likely to hit it.”

Consider next the ideas that can achieve your desired response.

Aristotle identified three kinds of ideas that can affect listeners: one can persuade rationally using logic (*logos*), or by touching feelings and emotions (*pathos*), or (this he considered most powerful) one is persuasive when viewed as a good person worthy of belief (*ethos*). Each of them involves a profound consideration of audience.

Logos with audience in mind

Aristotle explored logical demonstration in detail, its basic form the syllogism (two premises and a conclusion) in its many permutations. But he realized that syllogisms seldom appear entire in rhetorical discourse; instead rhetorical reasoning employs the *enthymeme*, a form of logic often described as a truncated syllogism, a syllogism with one of its three statements missing. Bitzer clarified that the “missing” logical part is not missing at all, but resides in the minds of listeners.²⁶ In other words, when rhetorical logic works, the audience is actively supplying parts of the arguments from their previous store of knowledge and beliefs.

Consider, as a simple example, this often used argument among us:

1. What Scripture says is truth. (major premise)
2. Scripture says “xyz.” (minor premise)
3. Therefore “xyz” is true. (conclusion)

In preaching, we do not typically state all three of these points. We likely state only numbers 2 and 3. Sometime we will state only number 2, and assume that the listener draws the conclusion in number 3. This

²⁶ Lloyd F. Bitzer, “Aristotle’s Enthymeme Revisited,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 45 (1959): 388–408, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00335635909382374>.

works as effective logic so long as the listener already believes number 1. In most of our preaching, this is thankfully the case.

But the preacher must be aware when speaking to an audience that does not accept number 1, that the ordinary #2 + #3 formula will not be persuasive. For such an audience, a different approach must be devised. In short, our approach to using logic must take audience beliefs into account.

(Of course, the Holy Spirit can work simply through proclamations of the Word, but that is not logic.)

Pathos with audience in mind

Lutherans traditionally distrust emotional appeals, reacting to the emotional excess in other religious traditions. Yet any of us can recall being moved, perhaps deeply, by a good preacher. Should it happen every Sunday? Should some kind of emotional response be an aim in every sermon?

However you answer that question, at least (it seems to me) the preacher should be well enough acquainted with his flock to know and speak to their emotional lives. What makes them happy? What makes them rejoice? What are they worried about this week? What are they afraid of, right now as you preach to them? What troubles will they return to as they leave church? God knows, and cares about these “pleasure and pain points” in the lives of your listeners, and as God’s messenger, you should be touching them too in your applications of God’s Word.

Ethos with audience in mind

Few are persuaded by a speaker they don’t respect and trust. Gone are the days when the pastor received automatic respect simply because of his position, or even as the best educated person in the county. Aristotle considered ethos, the character of the speaker in the audience’s view, as the most potent means of persuasion. He analyzed it in three aspects: an effective speaker must be **perceived by the audience** to be a person of...

1. **good sense.** The speaker should come across as knowledgeable, smart, not easily fooled. These days, for example, the preacher should be careful about making scientific pronouncements usually borrowed from others; most of us are not trained scientists.²⁷ Stating a political position

²⁷ For example, someone lumping together the pseudo-science of macro-evolution and the science of climate change, as if they were alike, can lose credibility with informed

will lose the respect of half your audience. Be careful what you “tweet” and what you “like” online; your wife too!

2. The audience should perceive in the speaker a person of **good character**: this can’t be faked, and should not be a question among us. But realize its importance in your credibility. Cooke encourages pastors to be upfront about what, in their personal background, drives them. Embrace your past, he says, for credibility and motive.²⁸

3. And thirdly, the audience should perceive in the speaker a person of **good will**—that is, someone totally on their side, wanting for them only the best. Christians, enjoined to display love as the foremost sign of their faith,²⁹ should be good at this. Today those who proclaim biblical truth are branded bigots and haters (sadly correctly in some cases); we should be experts at expressing biblical truths in ways that anyone, even Google, can recognize as loving and caring, and will not reject as “hate speech.” Finally know that people who believe in your love and care will forgive transgressions in other areas.

I can’t leave *inventio* without a mention of stories and their value in preaching. Many here are expert in their use—all of us should be.³⁰

2. Organization

Cicero, thinking in his legislative context, held that a speech ought to have six parts:

Exordium—designed to get attention and establish ethos

Narratio—background of the issue at hand

Partitio—review of aspects agreed upon, and approach to those not

Confrimatio—arguments favoring the speaker’s view

Reprehensio—arguments countering opposing views

Peroratio—summary, stirring conclusion

Can you imagine a sermon arranged like this?

Whether or not the speaker needs six parts, or only the frequent “theme and two parts,” the principle is this: let your material be easily understood by the audience.

listeners.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 100–101.

²⁹ John 13:35.

³⁰ For a quick brush-up, see Shawn Stafford, “Preaching the Old Testament, Even if You Follow the One-Year Series,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (December 2019): 359–366. Walter R. Fischer is the best known exponent of the power of narrative in communication; see for example Walter R. Fisher, “The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration,” *Communication Monographs* 52, no. 4 (1985): 347–367.

At the University of Wisconsin, I developed a theory of structure that took the audience into account. I called it the theory of “public patterns.”

A “public pattern” is an organizational structure—a way of understanding things—so common to humankind that listeners find information presented using a public pattern easy to assimilate into their own understanding. A speaker conveying a difficult concept should arrange that concept into a public pattern, convey it to the listeners so structured, with the aim of enabling the audience to fit the concept into their own understanding with ease.

For example, a **temporal sequence** is a public pattern; every human being experiences the flow of time. Hence, everyone finds it easy to understand things in terms of what happened first, what happened next, and what happened last. Another is a **spatial sequence**; since we all live in a three-dimensional world, we often understand things in sequences of left-center-right, or bottom-middle-top. If a speaker presents material structured in such a sequence, listeners will understand it quickly. Other public patterns—ways of structuring understandings common to all—include **cause-and-effect** and **problem-solution** (a variation of which is **Law-Gospel**). Difficult information should always be arranged by the speaker into a structure for which the listener is ready—a public pattern.

A widely taught organizational pattern for persuasive speaking was the “motivated sequence.”³¹ Imagine a sermon organized like this:

1. *attention step*—grab audience attention and direct it to the subject
2. *need step*—a problem analysis: state the problem – show the problem exists and is serious – and it’s YOUR problem
3. *satisfaction step*—state the solution, explain it clearly, show it will work, possibly meet audience objections
4. *visualization step*—feel how nice it will be when solution is adopted! (recognizing emotion is needed to motivate)
5. *action step*—do it! in the form of a challenge, appeal, quotation, illustration, inducement, or statement of personal intention

Kenneth Burke’s theory of structure also took audience into account. Recognizing that listeners are not merely passive, but active participants in the communication act, he observed how they participate in the structure presented by the speaker. Consider, for example, the rhetorical device of repetition. Once listeners recognize a speaker’s repetition, they

³¹ Designed by Alan H. Monroe at Purdue University.

mentally “say it along” with the speaker each time it occurs. In Martin Luther King’s famous “I have a dream” speech, which included seven instances of effectively repeated phrases, listeners actually spoke them with King out loud. Burke observed that a listener who in this way participates in a form will more likely agree with the content.³²

Burke claimed that effective speech structure interacts with audience characteristics, and urged speakers to structure speeches to create appetites, and then satisfy them. Our standard Law-then-Gospel structure follows this principle; other sequences can do this as well. For example, instead of explicating a text and then applying it, why not set up a need from the listener’s life, and then provide Scripture’s answer to it? Instead of retelling the Bible story and then applying it, why not raise a life question, and then bring in the Bible story as an answer to it. In Gospel preaching, first show where in our lives we need its power, and then show how God’s gracious acts empower us (this is how the message came in Jesus’ day).

But all of the above might be obsolete. In a white paper on “Christians and Social Media,” the LC-MS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) observed:

Digital natives are not only more fluent in digital language, they may even *think* differently. Children raised with the computer can develop hypertext minds. They leap around. It’s as though their cognitive structures were parallel, not sequential.³³

Perhaps the traditional rules of structure are going out of date.

³² Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives, and A Rhetoric of Motives* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1962).

³³ Perhaps more frightening, the CTCR goes on to observe this about cognitive ability: “Digital natives ... may sometimes struggle in their ability to reflect on what they know and their ability to generalize and learn from their experiences. ... Do the children and adults who listen to sermons and attend Bible classes in our churches suffer from an inability to interpret and reflect on what they hear and read? Young people especially may differ in the way they read Scripture. Since online content supplies a steady stream of words and images for them, they may not be able to use their imagination as they read a passage from the Bible or another book. They may be unable to visualize the setting or interpret what the characters are saying, thinking and feeling. The imaginations of such readers are weak, not least because the media they consume supply all the sights and sounds that the mind creates when all it has is words on a page. These changes may not change the content of our teaching and preaching, but may call for new ways to present that teaching.” Commission on Theology And Church Relations LC-MS, “A Snapshot Of Trending Tools: Christians And Social Media,” February 2019, <https://files.lcms.org/wl/?id=ntp6kcgZ6krg44AtLFGhaRY7SfoWJp2L>.

3. Style

“Style” as a rhetorical category involves selecting appropriate words and expressions that most effectively influence your audience. Throughout the history of rhetoric, from Aristotle through Blair, and on to Reagles, the foremost stylistic goal has been CLARITY. Reagles remind us, for Aristotle “audience analysis ... put *clarity* at the top of communicative priorities, for ‘a good style is, first of all, clear.’”³⁴

A century ago our pastors faced a peculiar stylistic challenge, preaching in English. Theodore Graebner’s 1920 Homiletics text,³⁵ probably due to this challenge, devoted nearly half the book to matters of “style” and “diction,” with section headings like these: Harmony, Elegance, Euphony, Rhythm, Cadence, and Avoidance of Cacophony. Such concepts are not discussed in Homiletics classes today. Graebner included an eleven page section on how to avoid “Germanisms” when preaching in English, including ...

long sentences overloaded with subordinate clauses,

excessive use of modifiers and connectives (“Behold how *therefore* Thy poor little flock *now so often* cries *again* faint-heartedly: Lord, save us! Too many adverbs.”),

compound words (“Thus we read in the Smaller Catechism of Luther, the chief *housebook* of our Church.’ House-book is not English; say, well known in the homes of our Church.”),

translations of *nur, doch, also, eben* and other emphatics sneak into English (“Let us confide in our baptism, by which *already* long ago we were received into God’s covenant of grace.’ Better: Let our trust be. Omit *already*.”),

improper use of articles (“We are saved through *the faith* in Jesus Christ.’ Say ‘through faith.’ ... Where German has *die Tugend, die Hoffnung, der Zorn, das Verlangen*, English generally may omit the article.”).

Richard Wiechman confided that an ancestor of his left the ministry due to the difficulty of preaching in good English.

³⁴ Ibid., 3.

³⁵ Th. Graebner, *The Expository Preacher: A System of Inductive Homiletics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1920).

I leave it to you in discussion to recall some Norwegianisms that may persist among us to this day.

4. *Memory*

Memory serves the speaker in at least two ways.

First it helps to stock one's mind with knowledge. The preacher knows Scripture, of course. He must also know people and the world. Today knowing "people" is complex; the mission-minded pastor must understand the life situations of a multi-cultural audience widening before his very doorstep. And with technology, a preacher's doorstep can extend far.

Appreciate, again, a liberal arts education! Appreciate, too, world travel, even better when beyond the Americanized bubble of the guided tour.³⁶ Today one need not travel far to encounter and experience other cultures. *Truth in Love Ministries* is helping us understand Mormons. The Gospel Outreach With Media online conferences can bring multicultural mission experiences into your home.³⁷ And then there is the old-fashioned practice of widespread reading. All these can stock memory with understandings and materials for preaching.

Memory serves the preacher in a second way: cementing the points—perhaps the very wording—of the sermon in the mind for preaching. That brings us to the last of the five "canons of rhetoric": delivery.

5. *Delivery*

I don't know that we teach much affirmatively about delivery in Homiletics these days. Our approach seeks more simply to clean up defects—lack of eye contact, monotonous voice, gripping pulpit; if

³⁶ I had heard somewhere that long ago it was a requirement that Seminary students study for a while outside the United States. I checked with Erling Teigen who said, "SCY [when he went to Leipzig] had already completed his seminary work, and was a candidate of theology. There were a few students who studied at Leipzig or elsewhere for MA or PhD work, but not a lot. Mostly they were bright young men who seemed destined to teach. A few went to Oslo to study under Gisle Johnson and Caspari. In some cases, there were some family funds available, and others, like the Ylvisakers had to scratch for the funds. I think Johannes had to borrow money for SCY. H. G. Stub went to Luther College, then Ft. Wayne, then St. Louis, then Leipzig. Johannes Ylvisaker went to Luther College, then St. Louis, and then one year in Leipzig, Nils, SCY's brother spent a year at Oslo. Olaf Brandt went to Luther, then Northwestern, Wisc Synod, then St. Louis, then Leipzig—I'm sure there were others, but I don't think it was required." Email correspondence with author, June 24, 2019.

³⁷ Archived at www.gowm.org.

any of these show up in a seminary practice sermon, classmates in the critique session appropriately point them out.

In Speech class I taught affirmatively about delivery, dividing it into vocal and visual aspects, the latter in turn divided into movement and gesture. I taught too about modes of delivery, exploring extemporaneous vs. manuscript delivery. Each of these has increased in relevance today.

Regarding the vocal aspects of delivery—use of the voice, what the audience hears—variety is the key. Strategically employing all dimensions of vocal variety—volume, intensity (not the same as volume), pitch, pace, and effective placement of silence (“the pause”) all contribute to a presentation more interesting to listen to and hence more effective. Realize too that the voice one hears as he speaks may not be the same voice heard by the listener; due to characteristics of vocal sounds, some speakers hear variation in their own voice while their listeners hear a monotonous tone. Feedback from a friendly critic can be illuminating in this regard.

Microphones and sound systems have created new delivery challenges. For one thing, the systems themselves might not be dependable; if multiple speakers are poorly placed, for example, they interfere with each other, garbling your articulation and creating problems for listeners’ understanding. But more important, please, for the sake of aging ears like mine, remember this: the presence of a microphone does not relieve the preacher of the obligation to project his voice. Even the quiet parts of the sermon—especially those—require the voice to carry to the back pews. Speaking as if in a one-on-one conversation, even in front of a microphone, is private, not public, speaking. Presenting the most important part of the sermon, the Gospel section, in a passionate whisper is not preaching the Gospel at all if people can’t hear it. It distresses them to realize they are not hearing the most important part of the sermon.

The visual aspects of delivery—what the audience sees—deserve attention since movement and gestures communicate meanings and help maintain attention. In Speech class I distinguished between “movement” and “gestures,” the former involving transporting the body from place to place by taking steps, and the latter involving moving parts of the body, usually hands, arms, and facial expression. Regarding the latter, I did not get as detailed as Dr. Fry who, in his 1897 *Homiletics* devoted several paragraphs each to not only the arms and hands, but the fingers, the eyes, and the lips.³⁸ I only recommended that good gestures

³⁸ “A loose, flabby lip not only prevents distinct articulation, but indicates want of information and lack in decision of character; whereas a firm lip reveals scholarly habits

flow from natural impulses, and should not be hindered by bad habits such as gripping the sides of the lectern (pulpit).

What I taught about “movement”—taking steps on the speaking platform—was irrelevant to preaching so long as the preacher was confined in the pulpit. But lately, in most WELS churches I have visited, I have noticed that the preacher has relinquished the pulpit—it has become a vestigial and useless piece of furniture off to the side—and he is speaking from the step in the middle of the chancel. I asked Prof. John Hartwig, who teaches Homiletics at Mequon, whether this was being recommended in the seminary there. His reply:

At the seminary during the first two years of preaching instruction students are encouraged to preach from the pulpit. When they go out into their vicarage congregations, they will do whatever is the common practice in that congregation. It is my experience that in our newer mission congregations many pastors are preaching from front and center, not from the pulpit.³⁹

I remember a few years ago when a young pastor from our seminary attempted that preaching approach in one of our Iowa congregations, creating an uproar. “Too much like TV preachers,” they said. This pastor is no longer among us.

But times and tastes change, and if this practice is about to spread among us, then principles of “movement” become relevant. The basic principle: movement communicates. Taking steps toward the audience will emphasize a point (as the speaker’s image looms larger in their eyes); conversely moving away de-emphasizes (perhaps when explaining a false teaching). Taking steps from side to side signals a transition, and helps listeners follow sermon structure; for part one the preacher is on the left, when starting part two he moves to the right. Purposeful movement can powerfully communicate.

But non-purposeful movement does the opposite. Randomly walking around, pacing back and forth while speaking is worse than simply squandering the communication potential of meaningful movement. It distracts and annoys—“where is he going next?” “Oops will he bump into the font?” If a preacher is going to leave the pulpit, he MUST learn to control his movements; essentially, stand in one spot

and strong convictions.” Jacob Fry, *Elementary Homiletics, or Rules and Principles in the Preparation and Preaching of Sermons* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1897), 135ff.

³⁹ Email exchange, June 3, 2019.

unless the movement is meaningful, conveying emphasis/de-emphasis or a transition in thought.

Relinquishing the pulpit also dictates practice regarding one of the oldest controversies among preachers of the modern era: extemporaneous vs. manuscript delivery. A survey of “Pulpit Practices” presented to this conference in 2006 noted that 75% of us wrote out our sermons in full, 47% memorized them, and 73% had the full manuscript in front of them while preaching, though only 4% admitted to reading the sermon from the manuscript. Only 4% reported “regularly preaching away from the pulpit.”

I taught my speech class that, while speaking from a manuscript was appropriate when careful wording was crucial—as in a presidential address on a sensitive foreign policy—the best mode of delivery was extemporaneous,⁴⁰ defined as a carefully prepared and outlined speech, which was then rehearsed multiple times speaking from the outline (not a manuscript) so that the IDEAS (but not necessarily the same WORDS) were well in mind. This kind of extemporaneous speaking was preferred as not only the most lively, with a special kind of presence, but it also enabled the speaker to adjust on the spot to audience reactions—perhaps explaining a point further when seeing puzzlement on audience faces, or rephrasing a point if confusion was detected. Is such an approach to extemporaneous speaking appropriate in a sermon?

There is no mention of a pulpit or lectern in any New Testament preaching. By Luther’s day the pulpit was in common use, apparently expected if not mandatory.⁴¹ Pulpits were installed in Norwegian stave churches when the Reformation emphasis on preaching and hearing the Word replaced merely performing and witnessing the mass. Pulpit preaching has been expected among us at least until recently. There is something about a pulpit that conveys the authority of a spokesman of God, as well as an impression of careful preparation rather than a random stream of the speaker’s thoughts. If we are leaving the pulpit, we are adopting either a memorized or extemporaneous (as defined above) mode of delivery, for nobody is going to leave the pulpit carrying a manuscript. It will be interesting to observe the progress and effect of this cultural change among us.

⁴⁰ Not to be confused with “impromptu delivery,” which involves no preparation and making up the speech on the spot.

⁴¹ The 2003 *Luther* movie notwithstanding, in which Joseph Fiennes as Luther preached while walking up and down the church aisle.

Visual aids

Technology has made it easier than ever to use visual aids in church. Yet they remain controversial. I taught my basic speech classes to use visual aids as often as possible, since they are powerful communication devices and really do “aid” the speaker in at least three ways:

1. they clarify—recall the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words
2. they control attention—hold up something and the audience looks at it
3. they impact memory—experience shows that the visual aid is what people remember about the speech.⁴²

While conveying God’s Word verbally is central to God’s plan to “preach the Gospel,” the objection that God’s message is properly conveyed **only** verbally is countered by numerous examples throughout Scripture. Consider the rainbow of promise, Jacob’s ladder, the burning bush, the blood on the lintel, the tablets of stone, the Passover ceremony, altar coverings, onyx stones, grain offering, the breast piece, trumpets during the Passover Feast, the pillars of cloud and of fire, “What mean these stones?”, phylacteries, showbread, the snake on the pole, indeed; every one of the thousands of animal sacrifices carried out over centuries, the Spirit as a dove, and the tongues of fire. Our Lord frequently pointed to nearby objects to help make a point: “Behold, the lilies of the field,” “the birds of the air,” “He set a little child in their midst,” “show me a coin,” etc. He used the temple as representation of His body; He washed His disciples’ feet as an object lesson; He presented Himself after His resurrection as proof of His teaching. He Himself was a visual representation of God, “the Word made flesh,” which John engaged with multiple senses: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched....”⁴³ Then He gave us the Sacraments, means by which the Holy Spirit works faith in hearts, which I was taught in confirmation class were “visual Gospel.”

Involvement of multiple senses increases our awareness of participation in worship. Along with actions of praying, kneeling, bowing, crossing, singing, praising, eating, drinking, and listening, our worship experiences are purposefully filled with appeals to senses beyond just

⁴² Curtis Deterding explored especially this point in depth. “The Impact of Visual Aids on Memory in Preaching,” (D.M. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2005).

⁴³ 1 John 1:1.

hearing. While we are not as given to incense as some traditions are, one can know without looking the presence of lilies on Easter morning. Visual aids common among us during worship, besides water, bread and wine, include hymnbooks, stained glass windows, an altar, offering plates, paten, chalice, cups, crosses, the altar Bible, banners, font, sculpture (such as Thorvaldsen's Christ statue at Bethany), and of course altar pieces and other works of art.

So why not in sermons?

Why not PowerPoints in sermons?

Of course, I gave students this caveat: when poorly used, their power makes visual aids counterproductive. When the projector doesn't work, when the poster falls off the easel, when the people in the back can't see the tiny thing in your hand, the whole point of your sermon may be lost. Especially make sure visual aids connect to the Gospel message, the focal point of every sermon. And practice with them so you are sure they work.⁴⁴

Related to the visual, let me note here very briefly the management of lighting in our worship and sacred concert venues, which can work powerfully to create atmosphere conducive to the occasion—among us an untapped potential.

Extended performance

I taught my forensics competitors: your performance begins well before you stand in front of the audience. The judge is watching you when you enter the competition room. Your performance itself begins when your name is called, and includes your walk to the front of the room, the way you turn to face the listeners, how you look and how you stand before uttering your first word. It also includes your walk back to your seat after speaking your final word.

⁴⁴ Deterding's principles for using visual aids in sermons supply good advice:

1. *The focal point of the visual in a sermon is the Gospel.*
2. *Control the interpretation of the visual as much as possible.*
3. *Prepare and practice in advance actually using or demonstrating the visual you are planning to use.*
4. *Make sure your visual is visible.*
5. *The visual needs to successfully increase the retention of the main Gospel theme.*
6. *Make sure that the actual object is appropriate and not objectionable.* [While both attention-grabbing and gospel-related—and surely memorable—an actual animal sacrifice should probably not be used. Distinguish wisely between legitimate visual aids and gimmicks—no preaching in a clown costume, please.]
7. *Take care not to overuse a visual.*

Ibid., 70ff.

In the same way, the sermon “performance” extends well beyond those moments in the pulpit. It is part of the entire worship service. In fact, it extends beyond the service; the pastor who visits his parishioners knows that the sermon is an extension of the conversations he has with his flock.

Rhetorical theory tells us that beginnings and endings are especially important moments. The speech’s opening line is perhaps the only moment during the speech when the listener is willingly giving the speaker complete attention, and should be carefully crafted; as listeners attend to the opening line, they are deciding whether or not to listen to the second line.

What is the opening line of our sermons, the first words out of our mouth in the pulpit? Often it is a routine expression, usually beautiful but not necessarily attention grabbing. “Grace be unto you, and peace....” It’s easy for the listener to think, “I’ve heard this before,” and focus attention instead on whether the kids are standing up straight. Next the preacher says, “Our text for today is ...” Again important: unlike some others, we preach from Scripture texts. But who enters church feeling a burning desire to know what text the pastor is using today? It’s not attention-grabbing. The text is then read—certainly important, this is God’s Word—but if it’s a familiar text, the listener again can think, “I’ve heard this before and know how it turns out,” and direct attention elsewhere. Finally, the brief prayer, “Sanctify us by your Truth....” After all that, finally the first line of the sermon itself is pronounced, but its attention-grabbing potential has been squandered.

Instead, let the first words out of the pastor’s mouth at the sermon’s start be that carefully crafted attention-grabbing opening line, which leads to an introduction focusing attention on what especially to watch for in the familiar text, so that this time we listen to it with fresh ears. Then read the text, and continue the sermon.

We don’t have to do it that way every time, of course. Variety in presentation also commands interest and attention.

And what about endings? Most of us do well at bringing sermons to some kind of ringing conclusion so that the final “amen” does not surprise us. That closing line, we hope, can echo in the ears and minds of listeners for the rest of the service, and beyond. But extend the “performance” to the ending of the service, the benediction, and perhaps a closing hymn. Oh, then come “the announcements,” to draw attention to a few items on the coming week’s calendar.

But does this practice squander another of the important moments in our worship? Like the final words of the sermon that we hope will echo in the ears and hearts of our listeners, should not the final words of the service do the same? Why do we tread on the ringing encouragement of the benediction from our Lord by following it with messages of the mundane? As our people walk out of the sanctuary having just encountered their Savior God, what last thought should they be carrying on their hearts—“The Lord bless you and keep you ...” or “Don’t forget to bring brownies to the bake sale”?

Some congregations have “banned” announcements for reasons like these: they aren’t effective, people find them boring and don’t pay attention, there are better ways to communicate them, and (as above) they don’t fit in a worship setting. Yes we want people to be informed about important happenings. But they are printed in the bulletin. If people don’t read them, is there a better way of highlighting them? Project them on a screen before the service starts? Mention them at the time of the offering? Put up signs in the narthex? Make use of the growing number of communication channels to target messages to those most receptive to them?⁴⁵

Like many a good sermon, I conclude by returning to the opening theme: the state of preaching among us is strong. For that we thank the Lord God the Holy Spirit.

But given the centrality of sermon-making in our work, I close with a modest proposal:

Should we not have a synodical *Commission on Preaching*? Two or three people could be elected or appointed to do things like these:

- Stay abreast of new trends in preaching, evaluate them, if good recommend them.
- Suggest good preaching helps, sample sermons, and other materials to assist pastors with the continuous challenge of sermon preparation.

⁴⁵ About substituting stories for announcements, see <https://www.churchmarketingsucks.com/2018/10/church-banned-announcements-yes-im-serious/>. About putting announcements in the middle, at offering, or at beginning, see <https://www.churchmarketingsucks.com/2018/10/church-banned-announcements-yes-im-serious/>. For alternatives to announcements see <https://www.churchmarketingsucks.com/2018/09/announcements-last-resort/>. On a related note, why does the pastor have to make all the announcements? Why not demonstrate the priesthood of all believers by having a young person make the announcement about the youth meeting, and a council member make the announcement about a council decision, and a woman make the announcement about the women’s activity? Demonstrate that you have an actively involved membership.

- Arrange a voluntary system by which pastors may improve their preaching by submitting samples to be thoughtfully critiqued.
- Suggest ways to educate parishioners so they better appreciate sermons and attend to them more knowledgably.
- Report their work regularly to the various pastors' conferences and to the synod in convention, in order to keep the importance and appreciation of good preaching prominent among us.
- Continue to remind us all that every sermon must contain a clear expression of this wonderful proclamation: **because of Jesus, your sins are forgiven!** ^{LSQ}

New England's Visible Saints: The Early Ecclesiology of Puritan America and Its Defense Against the Half-Way Covenant

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THIS PAPER'S TITLE PAYS HOMAGE TO EDMUND S. Morgan's seminal study *Visible Saints: The History of the Puritan Idea*. The phrase *visible saints* invokes the Puritan ecclesiological aspiration of bringing the visible church more into harmony with the invisible church of all believers.¹ This idea, which has captured the attention of this study, achieved its definitive refinement in Puritan New England. Here church membership became limited to visible saints. The Puritan New Englanders defined these visible saints as *immediate members* who were qualified by a proof of faith (i.e., a conversion narrative). Baptism, furthermore, became restricted exclusively to these visible saints' children who were called *mediate members*. Under theological, social, and political pressure, the 1662 Boston Synod, conversely, affirmed *meer* (*mere* or *bare*) *membership*, later dubbed the *half-way covenant* in the eighteenth century.² Meer members referred to all professed members (including their children) who had not given a proof of faith. Meer members would still not be permitted to the Lord's Supper, but their children could be baptized. This paper addresses three questions: How did the conception of immediate membership and mediate membership develop? How they became standard practices in

¹ Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of the Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 10.

² Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 8.

Puritan New England? How were they defended when threatened by the 1662 Boston Synod's meer membership?

This study will proceed as follows: First, the historical background of English Puritanism and its American manifestation will be discussed. Second, it will show how the practice of limiting membership to visible saints and their children came about. Third, the events leading from the codification of the distinctive New England version of Congregationalism in the 1648 Cambridge Platform to the overturning of New England's unique membership and baptismal practices at the so-called 1662 Boston Synod will be traced. Finally, John Davenport's (1597–1670) refutation of meer membership will be analyzed to see how these membership and baptismal practices were defended. This study argues that the limiting of church membership to the visible saints and of baptism to their children were practices that developed in New England, albeit with earlier antecedents. The new world afforded the Puritans an environment where they were free and able to develop these distinctive practices and a form of Congregationalism that would not have been possible in England. Rooted in the Puritan desire for a visible church more in harmony with the invisible church of the elect and the Puritan morphology of conversion, this restricting of membership arose as a response in New England to emigrants that did not share the Puritan vision of the church. The conversion narrative or proof of faith probably emerged from the 1634 Boston revival preached by John Cotton (1584–1652) and eventually became an essential qualification of church membership around 1640. Cotton himself was most likely not responsible for making it an essential qualification for membership. In the wake of the 1662 Boston Synod, which affirmed the concept of meer membership, the minority of pastors and majority of laymen dissented from the counsel of the synod. In light of John Davenport's *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth*, the key to the dissenters' defense of the limiting of membership to visible saints and their children against the synod was the distinction between immediate and mediate membership along with a rejection of any notion of meer membership. Grounding this distinction in an early New England Puritan interpretation of Scripture and certain respected divines (i.e., theologians), Davenport argued that immediate membership is the only biblical form of adult membership, and that it can only be granted by a proof of saving faith. In the same way, mediate membership is the only biblical form of infant membership, and it can only be received from believing parents. If a child does not eventually take hold of the covenant, (i.e., become a

personal, full, and immediate member of the church able to commune, vote, and experience church discipline), then he is discovenanted and so are any children that he might have. With this in mind, Davenport defends the credibility of the dissenters. He suggests the 1662 Boston Synod is the real innovator. Finally, he refutes the 1662 Boston Synod's seven propositions that affirmed meer membership because it would only pollute the visible church in his mind.

In order to understand New England Puritanism, it is imperative to have some comprehension of the development of English Puritanism and English Separatism. For many Americans, Puritans and Pilgrims conjure up images of dower and repressed religious fanatics or black-dressed and buckle-laden Protestants seeking a land where they could practice religious freedom and give birth to democracy. Clichés aside, *Puritan* is a somewhat nebulous polemical term, lacking ecclesiastical and confessional precision.³ Roman Catholics probably first coined the term. It was intended to imply Puritans were a greater threat to the Church of England than Roman Catholicism and that Puritans were early modern Donatists.⁴ Even though there are antecedents of Puritanism during the reign of Edward VI (1547–1553) and in the Calvinist theology of some of the Marian exiles, the Puritan movement really emerged in reaction to the carefully formulated 1559 Elizabethan Settlement.⁵ Recognizing that Puritanism is notoriously difficult to define and that the following definition claims no final word on the subject, it is cited because it alludes to a couple of important aspects of Puritanism relevant to this study.

Puritanism has been defined variously in intellectual, political, or cultural terms, but it is best understood as a religious sensibility centered around conversion—the Holy Spirit's regeneration of the soul—and the concomitant determination to restore the purity of the apostolic church and reform society according to God's laws. Theologically, Puritanism represents an emphasis within the Reformed Protestant (Calvinist) tradition on intense personal devotion and extreme ethical probity.⁶

³ Patrick Collinson, "Puritans," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3:364.

⁴ Collinson, "Puritans," 3:366; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 6.

⁵ Collinson, "Puritans," 3:365.

⁶ Charles L. Cohen, "Puritanism," in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 638.

Thus, Puritanism is a very devout version of Calvinism that emphasizes God's sovereignty and thinks in terms of covenant relations with God. Its stress on conversion and the apostolic purity of the church facilitates a desire for a visible church made up of true believers cleansed of all popery. The Puritan accent on devotion and ethical integrity functions in part as an attestation of God's election and saving faith in a covenant relationship.

The strife between the Puritans and Elizabeth I (1533–1603) was generated not so much by theology as the proper practice of it. Prior to the settlement, Puritans believed she was the best avenue for church reform, but they quickly became disillusioned with the 1559 Elizabethan Settlement. The Puritans called for the removal of what they deemed the remaining popish elements from the English church such as church ornaments, vestments, ceremonies, organs, the sign of the cross, etc. This is why they became known as nonconformists. Before long Puritans also discovered corruption in the membership of the church. This they attributed to degenerate clergy. The ministers were neither preaching the faith, nor excluding the unrepentant from the Lord's Supper. The bishops, who held the power of church discipline alone, were not using it in a manner suitable to the Puritans. Therefore, the Puritans came to lament the ever-widening gap between the invisible and visible church.⁷ Not surprisingly, some nonconformists advocated Presbyterianism already by the 1570s announcing in *An Admonition to the Parliament* (1572) a more radical and negative critique of the Church of England's ability to reform itself.⁸ The Puritan majority ultimately would remain within the church. Conversely, the Separatists like Robert Browne (ca. 1550–1633) demanded an exodus from the Church of England because it was incapable of reform. He also called for a church of the godly, although not a totally pure church in the Donatist or Anabaptist sense.⁹ Because separation gave them the ability to think out Puritan presuppositions, these Separatists, who felt church disciplines was essential for true church, played an important role in Puritan ecclesiology.¹⁰ In any case, the authoritarian reign of James I (1566–1625) and his attempts to marry his children into the Roman Catholic houses of Europe was hardly an improvement on the previous reign in the minds of many

⁷ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 6, 10–11.

⁸ Collinson, "Puritans," 3:366.

⁹ Collinson, "Puritans," 3:366; Allen Carden, *Puritan Christianity in American: Religion and Life in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 23.

¹⁰ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 18–19.

Puritans. Growing interest in Congregationalism (particularly at Cambridge University) offered Puritans an alternative to episcopacy and was a sign of the waning confidence in national reformation among the Puritans.¹¹ Nevertheless, it was not until Charles I (1600–1649) and Archbishop Laud (1573–1645) that a militant form of Puritanism emerged. Under their watch, relations with the Puritans further deteriorated. An anti-Calvinist theology was promoted. Poor political policies were advanced. Last, war with the Scots all contributed to the English Civil Wars (1642–1649), the Westminster Standards, and the Puritan Commonwealth of England (1649–1660).

Amidst these unfolding events, the Plymouth Colony (1620) and the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1630) were founded in New England. The Pilgrims, who founded the Plymouth Settlement, were English Separatists that sailed to Holland in 1608 to pursue a more tolerant environment than England. Finding Holland unsatisfactory, they obtained from the Virginia Company a land patent, immigrated to America, and established their colony. The Massachusetts Bay Colony was a Puritan settlement sponsored by the Massachusetts Bay Company, formerly the New England Company, which already had a small colony in Salem (1629).¹² In contrast to the Pilgrims, but like their English Counterparts, New England Puritans remained part of the Church of England. Corrupt as it was, the Puritans believed breaking with the Church of England would dishonor God.¹³ Both the colony's officers and John Winthrop (1588–1649), the newly elected governor, were to care for the company and colony from New England. For this reason, Winthrop and seven hundred colonists set sail in 1630, beginning a decade long great migration to New England. Problems for the Puritans under the Carolingian regime coupled with positive reports about Puritan Salem encouraged this migration. Other motives for migration were apprehension about England's future, a desire to be a model for the redemption of England, and the social ties between the emigrants.¹⁴

¹¹ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 93.

¹² Everett Emerson, *Puritanism in America: 1620–1750* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 33.

¹³ Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 52; Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 3.

¹⁴ Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, rev. ed. (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1995), 41–46.

Governor Winthrop's sermon "on board the *Arbella*—'A Modell of Christian Charity'—defined the Puritan's mission to create a biblical commonwealth in covenant with God that would 'be as a city set upon a hill.'"¹⁵ Not surprisingly, freemen were soon empowered to directly elect the governor and deputy governor. The goal of this Bible commonwealth was a godly society wherein church membership played an integral role.¹⁶

The trading company thus became a commonwealth, though it was far from being a "democracy" in the modern sense. The government and assistants were still to enact such laws as God's Word and passing exigencies might require; and only church members had the franchise. In 1634 the freemen asked and received still larger concessions, according to which the representatives of the several towns gained legislative powers. The Bay Colony governed itself by the resultant bicameral system without essential modification for over sixty years. To call it a theocracy is therefore absurd.¹⁷

New England church polity also took a distinctive shape that became known as the New England Way. The Salem colonists embraced a Congregational government where members selected and ordained their ministers as well as subscribed to the church covenant. Although the influence of the Plymouth Pilgrim's Congregationalism on Salem's church practices is debated, Salem set a Congregationalist pattern that New England Puritans would follow.¹⁸ This fledgling Congregationalism was complimented by like-minded Puritan emigrants after 1630. In sum, the desire for a visible church more in harmony with the invisible had roots in English nonconformity. The new world afforded the Puritans an environment where they were free to create a distinctive form of Congregationalism that would not have been possible in England. New England's development of a Bible commonwealth also limited the franchise to church members creating a social situation where nonmembers felt disenfranchised and came to resent New England's rather restrictive membership policies.

Some have tried to trace the New England practice of requiring a proof of faith (i.e., the conversion narrative that became an essential qualification of adult membership) and the practice of limiting

¹⁵ Philip Greven, "Winthrop, John," in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 832.

¹⁶ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 93.

¹⁷ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 147.

¹⁸ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 56–57.

of baptism (i.e., to the children of visible saints) to Puritan England, particularly the English Congregationalists. On the one hand, the roots of these two practices can be traced to English Puritanism's desire for a visible church more in harmony with the invisible church. Drawing on John Calvin (1509–1564), but also going beyond him, Puritans such as William Perkins (1558–1602) developed a morphology of conversion or stages of the acquisition of faith by which an individual could find some assurance of his election.¹⁹ In addition, Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603) and William Ames (1576–1633) argued that faith was an essential part of true church.²⁰ On the other hand, it would have been virtually impossible for English Puritans to require a test of faith or a conversion narrative for membership, since membership in the Church of England was nonrestrictive.²¹ Furthermore, no such demand can even be found among the English Congregational divines.²² Perhaps, English Separatism would seem like a far better candidate for the innovation of these practices because they were able to develop membership standards. But extant Separatist membership standards (e.g., subscription to the church's covenant, rejection of fellowship with the Church of England, good behavior, or a confession of faith) also did not demand a conversion narrative or a test of saving faith.²³ Though Henry Ainsworth (1571–1623) and John Robinson (ca. 1576–1625) seem to be moving in this direction, there is no data to substantiate that a proof of faith was ever required. Plymouth Pilgrims did not initiate any tests of faith as well. In fact, the Pilgrims actually introduced the conversion narrative as a qualification for membership only after New England Puritanism developed it.²⁴

The new requirement of a conversion narrative as an essential qualification of church membership and the limiting of baptism to the children of these visible saints must have developed in Puritan New England. For some time, the mandate for this new requirement was attributed to the Boston Church when John Cotton served it in the absence of its pastor.²⁵ There are some problems with this thesis

¹⁹ William Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 217–19, 228–29; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 67–73.

²⁰ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 52, 74; William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1968), 179–180.

²¹ Carden, *Puritan Christianity*, 102.

²² Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 65.

²³ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 33–42, 58.

²⁴ Carden, *Puritan Christianity*, 102.

²⁵ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 106.

that Francis Bremer will explicate in the block quote below, but the following is clear: Cotton's preaching caused a revival that drew many to this parish in 1634. It appears that these new converts felt the need to convey their faith via the practice of lay sermonizing or prophesying.²⁶ Soon a conversion narrative clearly became a necessary qualification for membership. Prior to 1636, both Newton and Dorchester were encouraged to take up the practice.²⁷ By 1640 Massachusetts and New Haven required it, and Connecticut accepted it to varying degrees.²⁸ The motive for this new restriction on membership is grounded in the fact that not all who voyaged to America shared the Puritan vision of the church, which necessitated the exclusion of such individuals if the church was really to be composed of visible saints. This being said, Francis Bremer explains the problems with claiming Cotton and the Boston Church first imposed it.

While the general pattern of this development is probably accurate, the identification of the Boston church, or at least of John Cotton, as having played key roles may be misguided. The more we understand about Cotton the more we recognize that he neither preached about nor was terribly concerned about the type of preparatory experience and outward evidence of sanctification that came to form the heart of conversion narratives. Furthermore, the sequential, logical narrative style of those confessions was alien to Cotton's style of dealing with the presence and meaning of grace. While the revival inspired by his preaching may have opened the eyes of other clergy to the usefulness of such lay narratives, it is likely that the first steps to regularize their delivery and require them for membership would have been taken by someone other than Cotton, perhaps by Thomas Hooker or Thomas Shepard.²⁹

Once this new qualification was established, the limiting of baptism to the children of the visible saints was its logical outcome. The Puritans had always limited baptism to church members. Whereas membership in England was nonrestrictive, membership in New England was defined via a proof of faith. In short, the new world provided the Puritans with an environment where they were free to develop distinctive

²⁶ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 107.

²⁷ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 107; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 146; Emerson, *Puritanism in America*, 49.

²⁸ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 4–5; Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 107.

²⁹ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 107.

membership practices that would not have been possible in England. Rooted in the Puritan desire for a visible church more in harmony with the invisible church of the elect and the Puritan morphology of conversion, this restricting of membership arose as a response in New England to emigrants that did not share the Puritan vision of the church. The conversion narrative probably emerged from the 1634 Boston revival preached by John Cotton and eventually became an essential qualification of church membership around 1640. Cotton himself was probably not responsible for making it an essential qualification for membership. The limiting of baptism to the children of members was nothing new in Puritanism, but the New England redefinition of a church member was a new development in Puritanism.

With the second generation of Puritans, the number of unregenerate in New England had increased. Allen Carden writes, "The failure of the many children of the first generation to undergo a conversion experience led to a compromise of the recently developed policy of membership comprised of the elect."³⁰ By 1645 Richard Mather (1596–1669) promoted a new approach to church membership, which the Boston Synod called *meer membership*.³¹ The eighteenth century term *half-way covenant* was probably first coined by Jonathan Edwards' (1703–1758) disciples as a synonym for meer membership. Richard Pope traced the term as far back as the New Divinity theologian Joseph Bellamy (1719–1790).³² Since most scholars refer to meer membership as the half-way covenant, the term is retained in this paper. The half-way covenant permitted the baptism of the children of all professed members regardless if they gave a conversion narrative or not, but still limited the Lord's Supper to full members of the church. Peter Bulkeley and George Phillips (1593–1644) soon rallied support for Mather's idea. But opponents such as John Davenport warned this new conception of membership would only pollute the churches.

Intimately linked with the half-way covenant was the rising threat posed to New England Congregationalism. To be sure, the New Englanders praised the English Puritan Revolution, but they still feared the English Puritan Presbyterian majority would impose Presbyterianism on New England. In addition, Presbyterianism had found sympathizers

³⁰ Williston Walker, ed. *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 244–45; Carden, *Puritan Christianity*, 103.

³¹ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 14; Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596–1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 55.

³² Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 8.

in New England. More inclined to a Presbyterian administration of a congregation, Thomas Parker and James Noyse, “opened baptism and the Lord’s Supper to all but notorious sinners” at the Newbury parish.³³ Writing to an acquaintance in the Westminster Assembly, Parker also suggested that New England has “a great need of help in way of Discipline.”³⁴ This letter was soon published in England and made New Englanders quite nervous. Similarly, the exclusion of those lacking proof of faith from membership regardless of their behavior led the remonstrants: Robert Child, Thomas Fowler, Samuel Maverick, Thomas Burton, John Smith, David Yale, and John Dand to submit an appeal for “redress of grievances to the General Court” in 1646 and to threaten appeal to England.³⁵ Recognizing English Presbyterian parishes would have granted them membership, they pointed out the social inequities of the New England Way that disenfranchised upstanding taxpayers who were restricted from membership.³⁶ The potential threat to the New England Way at home and abroad led the General Court to call the Cambridge Synod.

The Cambridge Synod was a preemptive defense of the New England Way intended to preclude the imposition of Presbyterianism on New England as well as treat the concerns raised about church membership.³⁷ Following some initial obstacles, John Cotton, Richard Mather, and Ralph Partridge were assigned the task of drawing up a model of church government.³⁸ Richard Mather’s text, which provided the basis of the Cambridge Platform (1648), supported the half-way covenant.³⁹ His plan might have been tolerable to dissenters at home and parliament. But John Davenport and Charles Chauncy managed to get it stricken from the platform, even though the majority favored the half-way covenant. The reason for this was that the Congregationalists had made enough inroads in parliament that the New Englanders no longer felt the pressure to compromise their practices.⁴⁰ This same platform codified the New England Way as something distinct from both authoritarian Presbyterianism and more tolerant radical independency.

³³ Bremer, *Puritan Experiment*, 132; Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 160.

³⁴ Bremer, *Puritan Experiment*, 132.

³⁵ Bremer, *Puritan Experiment*, 133–34.

³⁶ Bremer, *Puritan Experiment*, 134.

³⁷ Bremer, *Puritan Experiment*, 136–37.

³⁸ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 175.

³⁹ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 184–85.

⁴⁰ Bremer, *Puritan Experiment*, 136.

Against the Presbyterians the Cambridge Platform defined the polity of Congregationalism in great detail, documenting the New England Way as history had already exhibited it yet making it explicit “the communion of churches one with another” and giving it councils and synods strong advisory and admonitory powers but not legal coercive authority. Opposing the principle of toleration, it committed the churches to the doctrinal position of the Westminster Assembly. The delegates also declared that uniformity was to be maintained by the power of the magistrates, “the nursing fathers” of the church; heresy, disobedience, and schism were “to be restrained, & punished by civil authority.”⁴¹

Since synods only had advisory power, some began to experiment with the half-way covenant after the synod. Richard Mather launched it for a year in Dorchester, while Ipswich retained the practice once it was implemented. Eventually the Bay General Court summoned another assembly this time at Boston when Connecticut inquired about their membership practices.⁴² On June 4, 1657, ministers from both Massachusetts and Connecticut met, but New Haven refused to participate. In opposition to Charles Chauncy’s dissent and Davenport’s warnings of apostasy, the assembly promoted the half-way covenant to the general court. What changed? Charges of innovation no longer bothered the promoters of the half-way covenant. It was also the most viable solution to the growing gap between the community and church that did not profane the Lord’s Supper.⁴³

The 1648 Cambridge Platform and the 1657 Boston Assembly gave two contradictory answers to the membership question. Due to rising disorder in New England and the restoration of Charles II in 1660, a definitive answer to who were the subjects of baptism became the 1662 Boston Synod’s chief objective.⁴⁴ Here the supporters of the half-way covenant: Richard Mather, Thomas Cobbett, John Norton, John Wilson, John Elliot, Jonathan Mitchell presented seven propositions during its first session that would ultimately constitute the half-way covenant. Charles Chauncy and Richard Mather’s sons, Eleazer Mather and Increase Mather, represented the dissenters. John Davenport was unable to participate because he was at New Haven resisting its take over by Connecticut. But he wrote a seven point response to the synod

⁴¹ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 155–56.

⁴² Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 161.

⁴³ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 30.

⁴⁴ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 313.

during its later sessions. Despite the dissenting minority's best efforts, they were simply unable to prevail and the half-way covenant won synodical approval.

The Boston Synod only initiated the real war that raged throughout New England and lasted through the life of Jonathon Edwards.⁴⁵ Not long after the synod, Chauncy and Davenport penned polemics against it.⁴⁶ Yet, the strongest opponents of the half-way covenant were no doubt the laity. With the defection of Increase Mather and the deaths of Chauncy, Eleazer Mather, and Davenport, the power of the opposition waned. By 1676, four out of five congregations adopted the half-way covenant, but did not categorically practice it.⁴⁷ In sum, Congregationalism and membership comprised of the elect were not organically linked, but the New England resistance to Presbyterianism initially united them. Furthermore, the half-way covenant was probably the only viable solution to the growing gap between the community and the church that would preserve both the church and the Lord's Supper in the New England Bible commonwealths. The clout of the clergy among the laity was certainly undermined by the polemics and enlistment of the laity in the controversy. Finally, the half-way covenant need not be seen as a religious decline. It was a move more in harmony with Calvin and English Puritanism. What is more, Morgan and Pope maintain that it was religious scrupulosity and not a lack of piety that excluded so many of the second generation from membership.⁴⁸

The focus of this present endeavor will now shift in order to ascertain how the limiting of church membership to the visible saints and of baptism to their children was defended in the wake of the 1662 Boston Synod. This examination will be based on John Davenport's *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth, in Answer to Two Questions Concerning, I. The Subject of Baptism. II. The Consociation of the Churches*, which was printed by Samuel Green and Marmaduke Johnson at Cambridge in 1663.⁴⁹ The document itself is largely a point by point

⁴⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 1:431ff.

⁴⁶ Charles Chauncy, *Anti-Synodalia Scripta Americana* (London, 1662); *Answer of the Dissenting Ministers in the Synod Respecting Baptism and the Consociation of Churches* (Cambridge, 1662); John Davenport, *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth, in Answer to Two Questions, Concerning The Subject of Baptism, The Consociation of Churches* (Cambridge: Printed by Samuel Green and Marmaduke Johnson, 1663).

⁴⁷ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 165.

⁴⁸ Carden, *Puritan Christianity*, 104.

⁴⁹ Davenport, *Another Essay*, title page. Note that the document's unnumbered preface will be distinguished from the main body of the text via consecutive Roman

refutation of *The Answer of the Elders and Other Messengers of the Churches, Assembled at Boston in the Year 1662*.⁵⁰

The main contention in this portion of our paper is that as far as John Davenport is concerned the retention of the distinction between *immediate* (also called personal, full, or confederate membership established by a proof of faith typically a conversion narrative) and *mediate membership* is the fundamental presupposition and the key to the dissenters' argument against the 1662 Boston Synod's attempt to advance a new conception of church membership called *meer membership*.⁵¹ Davenport explains this distinction between immediate and mediate membership with the following words:

To grown persons not before baptized, after their holding forth their Repentance and Faith in Christ, and voluntary taking hold of the Covenant for themselves and their seed, Mat. 3.6. Luke 3.3. Acts 8.37, 38. & 2.39, 39. I Cor. 12.12, 13. These, for distinction sake, I call Immediate Members. 2. To their infant-seed or children in minority, who also are members in the right of their Parents covenanting for them, Acts 2.39. I Cor. 7.14. these I call Mediate Members; because the membership which they have is *Mediante Parentum foedere*: therefore, these being grown up, must be admitted into immediate fellowship, and full communion with the Church, by their personal faith held forth to the satisfaction of the Churches charitable discretion, and by their taking hold of the Covenant for themselves and their seed as their Parents before them did; as it is prophesied of Gospel-Churches in Isa. 56.6, 7. & 62.5.⁵²

Conversely, the synod's *meer membership*, applicable to adults desiring membership without proof of faith and apparently to their children as well, seems to be a sort of conflation of immediate and mediate membership.⁵³ Whether or not the synod specifically intended to call such children *meer members* is not altogether clear. Davenport could be read at one point as saying the term *meer membership* was used only for the adults in question.⁵⁴ However, the synod is very clear that the children in question just like their parents are granted baptism and are personally subject to church discipline, but are restricted from communion numerals.

⁵⁰ Walker, *The Creed and Platforms*, 301–39

⁵¹ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 327.

⁵² Davenport, *Another Essay*, 5.

⁵³ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 331–32.

⁵⁴ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 12.

and voting until qualified by full membership.⁵⁵ Since this is virtually identical with adult meer membership, it seems probable that such children were said to be meer members via their parents. This being said, this paper will examine both the structure and content of *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth* both to illustrate the argument against the synod and to see the crucial role the distinction between immediate and mediate church membership played in crafting this argument.

Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth is comprised of *An Apologetical Preface to the Reader* in fourteen unnumbered pages followed by the main body of the text titled, "Certain Positions out of the Scriptures Premised to the Whole Ensuing Discourse," in sixty-four pages. The main body of *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth* assumes the structure of *The Answer of the Elders and Other Messengers of the Churches* and organizes itself around *The Answer of the Elders and Other Messengers of the Churches'* two chief disputed questions, seven propositions, and supports in order to make a thorough refutation of the synod's attempt to establish a new conception of church membership in New England. The two questions dividing the main body of the texts are: "I. Who are the Subjects of Baptism?" and "II. Whether according to the Word of God there ought to be a Consociation of Churches, and what should be the manner of it?"⁵⁶ The entire document can also be subdivided as follows: After an introduction justifying the printing of *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth*, Davenport offers a rebuttal in his preface of the five objections raised against the dissenters at the synod held at Boston in 1662.⁵⁷ By *dissenters* he means those opposed to the half-way covenant. This section was penned to defend the character of the dissenters, to safeguard the integrity of their position, and perhaps also because the author may have had some guilt about being absent from the Boston Synod. He then presents seven reasons to explain why the dissenters felt compelled to diverge from the synod.⁵⁸ This stance is validated on the grounds that "our weightiest Reasons never were Answered unto any tolerable satisfaction, even to this day."⁵⁹ At this point, Davenport moves from the preface into the document itself summarizing his methodology with the following words, "For clearing the truth wherein, I shall first propound certain Theses, or Positions:

⁵⁵ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 318, 325, 327–28; Davenport, *Another Essay*, XII.

⁵⁶ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 9, 52.

⁵⁷ Davenport, *Another Essay*, I–III, III–X.

⁵⁸ Davenport, *Another Essay*, X–XIV.

⁵⁹ Davenport, *Another Essay*, X.

Secondly apply them, in a way of Replying to their Propositions.”⁶⁰ In other words, Davenport lists twelve positions or theses supporting the dissenters' view of baptism (position 1–10) and the consociation of the churches (position 11–12).⁶¹ In light of these positions, he examines the 1662 Boston Synod's seven propositions on baptism and makes remarks on the consociation of the churches.⁶² In short, *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth* provides a defense against the five objections posed against the dissenters, a statement of seven reasons justifying dissent, a presentation of the ten positions of the dissenters, and chiefly a point by point refutation of the Boston Synod's seven propositions on baptism. All of this is intended to reaffirm the distinction between immediate and mediate membership against the synod promotion of a half-way covenant.

As previously implied, the content of *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth* can also be divided into four parts and will therefore be examined under the following categories: five objections posed against the dissenters, seven reasons for dissent, ten propositions of the dissenters, and a refutation of the seven propositions. Proceeding with the objections, the initial charge merely dismisses the dissenting ministers as a minority opinion.⁶³ Davenport points out that a simple majority cannot be the litmus test of truth as the examples of Martin Luther (1483–1456), Jan Hus (ca. 1372–1415), and Paphnutius (ca. d. 360) testify. Even though the dissenters may be the minority, certain theologians respected on both sides demonstrate the superiority of the minority position. For instance, the New England divine, John Cotton, restricted baptism to the children of those fit for the Lord's Supper. The English Puritan, Henry Burton (1578–1648), is mentioned as one who concurs with the limiting of baptism to the children of believers in light of Acts 2:39. Similarly, Beverly warned against loose baptismal practices. To the next accusation of Anabaptism and of the denial of all church membership to infants, the practice of baptizing all children or no children is equally classified as sin. Thus, Davenport introduces the crucial distinction between immediate church membership (i.e., adults having personally entered into the covenant with God via a proof of faith enabling them to commune, vote, and be subject to church discipline) and mediate membership (i.e., children of immediate members entitled to membership and baptism via their parents) to explain that

⁶⁰ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 2.

⁶¹ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 2–8.

⁶² Davenport, *Another Essay*, 8–52, 52–64.

⁶³ Davenport, *Another Essay*, III–X.

only the children of adults who did not give proof of faith were excluded from baptized. The names and works of Robert Parker (ca. 1564–1614), Ames, Voetius (1589–1676), Hornbeck, Winter, Hanmer, and Cotton are referenced to support such a distinction between complete and incomplete membership.⁶⁴ The third charge that the dissenters teach those who do not take hold of the covenant can *discovenant* themselves even without a church's act of censure is conceded. Hebrews 10:25, 1 John 2:19, Jude 19, Genesis 17:7, Ames, English Congregationalists, Richard Mather, and previous New England practice are listed as supports. The admittance of baptized children to full membership only after they have professed faith as adults is further sanctioned by Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225).⁶⁵ With respect to the fourth objection, Davenport asserts that the church cares for its mediate members by making sure their parents do their duty to their children. Finally, the intellectual integrity of the dissenters is maintained and the fifth charge of ignorance is brushed aside.⁶⁶

The next part spells out the seven reasons for dissenting from the synod:⁶⁷ First, since the synod had once recognized that children should not be baptized if their parents lacked saving faith, it ought to reaffirm this position. Second, the bestowal of the seal of baptism upon the children of parents unworthy of the Lord's Supper is unbiblical. The promise of Acts 2:38–42 applied to the baptized believers (i.e., immediate members) who were enabled to devote themselves to the breaking of bread and their children (i.e., mediate members). This passage is cited in full because it is so vital to the dissenter argument.

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Davenport, *Another Essay*, III–VI.

⁶⁵ Davenport, *Another Essay*, VI–IX.

⁶⁶ Davenport, *Another Essay*, IX–X.

⁶⁷ Davenport, *Another Essay*, X–XIV.

⁶⁸ Acts 2:38–42 (ESV).

In fact, baptism was not practiced with less restriction than the Lord's Supper in the early church, he argues, for catechumens were not baptized until fit for the Lord's Supper. Third, the second generation of American Puritans did not retain their membership and are not true members "without some further Act."⁶⁹ Fourth, "it is not Meer Membership (as the Synod speaks) but qualified Membership that gives right unto baptism."⁷⁰ For instance, John's baptism, which was Christian baptism, was only granted to those "qualified with fruits of repentance" according to Luke 3:8 and 7:30.⁷¹ Fifth, if a man is incapable of receiving baptism himself, he cannot entitle his children to baptism. Even Martin Bucer (1491–1551) according to Parker said, "None ought to be confirmed Members of the Church besides those who do hold forth not onely verbal profession of faith, but apparent signs of regeneration."⁷² Sixth, just as unworthy reception of the Lord's Supper is a sacrilege so too the administration of baptism to those who are not true visible believers is a sacrilege. For this reason, both Tertullian and Augustine advocated tight restrictions on baptism. The later even remarked, "Whoever receives baptism unworthy receives judgment not salvation" [*Qui indigne accipit baptismam, iudicium accipit non salute*].⁷³ Seventh, baptism ought to be limited to the interested because it is a seal of the whole covenant of grace.

The propositions pertaining to baptism are as follows:⁷⁴ First, all inspired Scripture offers a perfect rule that governs man's holiness towards God and fellowmen (2 Tim. 3:16). Second, Christ's office is superior to that of Moses. Whatever he instituted or abrogated, is a binding ordinance appointed by God (Heb. 3:23; Deut. 12:32; Matt. 28:20). Third, Christ himself is superior to Moses. He alone has magisterial authority in the church and no one except Christ can alter his ordinances (Heb. 3:3; 10:7; John 4:23–24; 2 Cor. 11:2–3). Fourth, the Mosaic ordinances were obligatory until Christ removed these ordinances and instituted his royal priesthood (Heb. 7:12; 9:9–10; Acts 15:10; Matt. 11:29). Fifth, though the essence of the covenant of Abraham and kingdom

⁶⁹ Davenport, *Another Essay*, XII.

⁷⁰ Davenport, *Another Essay*, XII.

⁷¹ Davenport, *Another Essay*, XII.

⁷² Davenport, *Another Essay*, XIII.

⁷³ Davenport, *Another Essay*, XIII. Note this Latin quotation is from Pseudo-Augustine, *Contra Fulgentium Donatistam*, Chapter 6 in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris and Turnhout: Migne and Brepolis, 1859–63), 43:766.

⁷⁴ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 2–6.

of God are the same, their administration is different. The covenant of Abraham was more external and carnal whereas the kingdom of God is more spiritual and internal (Rom. 4:11–12; Matt. 21:43; John 1:17; Gal. 4:1–5). For instance, Paul writes, “But deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.”⁷⁵ Sixth, circumcision has been replaced by the new outward seal of baptism. Circumcision pertained to the entire household including slaves as Genesis 17:12–13 illustrates. “But Baptism is limited to believing Jews and their children, and to so many as the Lord our God shall call, Acts 2.38, 39. I Cor. 7.14.”⁷⁶ Seventh, the rules for administering the covenant and the kingdom must be taken from the New Testament not the Old Testament (Matt. 28:20; 1 Tim. 3:14–15). Eighth, Christ’s rules for the constitution of the church are that adults must be “approved believers” and at least one parent of a child must be “visibly joined to the Church of Christ” (Acts 2:38–39; 5:14; 1 Cor. 7:14; 2 Cor. 8:5, 1 Pet. 2:5).⁷⁷ Ninth, Christ’s rules for ordering the church consist of a number of rules pertaining to the public ministry, sacraments, and church discipline along with the extensive definition of the distinction between immediate and mediate membership cited earlier. Tenth, Christ’s rules for the propagation and continuing of Christian Churches occur in a congregational and spiritual form via visibly regenerated members and their children (John 1:12–13; 3:3–5; Rom. 10:10; 14:1–7; Gal. 3:6; Psalms 100:3; Col. 2:12; John 3:8; 2 John 4; 2 Tim. 1:5; Mal. 1:2).

The 1662 Boston Synod defined the half-way covenant in seven propositions contained in *The Answer of the Elders and Other Messengers of the Churches*. This paper will proceed by citing the proposition and then illustrating the basic arguments against each proposition.⁷⁸ The first proposition states, “They that according to Scripture are Members of the visible Church, are the Subjects of Baptisme.”⁷⁹ The second proposition said, “The members of the Visible Church according to scripture, are Confederate visible Believers, in particular Churches, and their infant-seed, i. e. children in minority, whose next parents, one or both, are in Covenant.”⁸⁰ The first two propositions are treated in a cursory fashion, but both are said to require modification. To place

⁷⁵ Hebrew 9:10.

⁷⁶ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 4.

⁷⁷ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 4.

⁷⁸ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 9–52.

⁷⁹ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 314; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 9.

⁸⁰ Walker, *The Creeds and Platform*, 316; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 9.

more emphasis on visible faith, Davenport indicates the first be revised to read, "They that, according to Christ's Ordinance, are regular, and actual members, & c." and that the second be altered to read, "The actual and regular Members of the visible Church, according to Christ's Ordinance, are, & c."⁸¹ The third proposition states, "The Infant-seed of confederate visible Believers, are members of the same Church with their parent, and when grown up, are personally under the watch, discipline, and Government of that Church."⁸² Here Davenport concedes that infants can be considered members of the same church with their parents with the stipulation that infants are considered mediate members. But infants are unable to be *personally* under the discipline of the church, and therefore they are subject to their parents. This stance is supported by a couple of points: There is no biblical evidence that proves children can be under church discipline. Since church discipline presupposes that a person under discipline can be personally removed from the covenant and since those lacking full membership are not personally in the covenant, infants as well as adults lacking proof of faith cannot be placed under church discipline. Subsequently, the synod's proposal will only encourage apostasy in the church according to Davenport. The fourth proposition states, "These Adult persons are not therefore to be admitted to full Communion, merely because they are and continue members, without such further qualifications, as the Word of God requireth thereunto."⁸³ With the exception of Davenport, the dissenters did not challenge this proposition.⁸⁴ The point of controversy here is that the proposition implies the baptized individuals who do not qualify for full membership as adults still *are and continue members* except not full members. Davenport retorts that only adults qualified by the Gospel-ordinances, (i.e., fit for the Lord's Supper and able to vote), can have any church membership in light of 1 Cor. 5:12 and 12:13. It was the fifth proposition that was most contentious and received the most attention.

Church-members, who were admitted in minority, understanding the Doctrine of Faith and publicly professing their assent thereto; not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the Covenant before the Church, wherein they give up themselves and their children to

⁸¹ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 9.

⁸² Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 325; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 9.

⁸³ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 327; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 16.

⁸⁴ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 62.

the Lord, and subject themselves to the Government of Christ in the Church, their children are to be Baptised.⁸⁵

Davenport opens declaring his fundamental problem with this proposition is that it conflicts with his tenth proposition, (i.e., the Bible demands more from infants and adults for church membership than the synod's fifth proposition). He continues,

The Parent must be fitly qualified before they may be admitted to Covenant with the Lord, and his Church, for themselves and their children: Else the Covenant will be profaned; and such covenanting cannot regularly give them, and their children, an interest in the Covenant, and title to Baptism. The Parents, or adult persons, regularly admitted to Covenant, must be believers in Christ, effectually called, in the charitable judgment of the Church, judging according to the Rule for to such only and their seed, is the Promise, or Covenant, Act 2.39.⁸⁶

The fact that St. Paul addresses many of his letters to the *faithful*, the *saints*, the *sanctified in Christ*, etc. only further shows that adult members must be believers whose faith has been demonstrated to the church. Even if parents are in the covenant, this does not mean their children will remain in the covenant. Referencing Ishmael and Esau as well as on Romans 2:25, "For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision," Davenport shows again that children who do not ultimately take hold of the covenant dis-covenant themselves. Moreover, Paul teaches, "This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring."⁸⁷ If the parents are not fit for immediate membership, it is their fault not the church's that their infants are excluded from the covenant. The fact that any hypocrite or even the devil himself can make a simple confession of the faith, avoid an outwardly scandalous life, subject himself to the government of the church, etc., indicates the Boston Synod's qualifications for membership are wanting at best. Thus, the synod's innovation of a meer membership is not a sound solution because it will only result in a corrupt church. Furthermore, Davenport rejects the synod's attempt to ascribe a sort of immediate or personal membership to both adults

⁸⁵ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 328; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 328.

⁸⁶ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 21.

⁸⁷ Romans 9:8.

and infants while making a distinction “1. Between the Efficient and Essence of Membership. 2. Between the Instrumental Efficient and Means thereof, which is the Parents profession and covenanting, and the Principal Efficient, which is Divine Institution.”⁸⁸ Reaffirming the mediate and immediate distinction against the synod’s meer membership and conflated version of immediate membership, Davenport writes:

... [C]ompleat and immediate Membership as such, doth infer compleat and immediate communion in all Church-privileges: But children in minority have not compleat and immediate communion in all Church-privileges without some further act or qualification: Therefore such children are not compleat and immediate Members, as such. Now to this, their Answer is insufficient: For, the best Members have need to make progress in memberly duties and qualification, to fit them more and more for Church-privileges. Yet all have that communion that suits their Membership: Infants, in Baptism, the Watch, Prayers, and Blessings of the Church, by their Parents covenanting for them: Adult persons, orderly and regularly joined by their personal covenanting for themselves, in Seals, Voting, and Censures, which belong to them, as such Members. Nor doth Scripture any where allow the Church to admit any one by personal covenanting for themselves and theirs, into any other Membership then compleat and immediate. But Infants are not capable of such Membership, without some further personal act and qualification, when they shall become adult. Therefore their Infant-membership is not compleat and immediate.⁸⁹

Just as a child of a freeman may trade under his father until he grows up and then must either assume the duties of the company of freeman or be prohibited from trade, an infant must take hold of the covenant when he becomes an adult or be discovenanted.⁹⁰ The last two propositions flow from the fifth and receive little attention by Davenport.⁹¹ The sixth proposition states,

Such Church-members, who either by death, or some other extraordinary Providence, have been inevitably hindered from publick acting, as aforesaid, yet, having given the Church cause in

⁸⁸ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 37.

⁸⁹ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 42.

⁹⁰ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 45–46.

⁹¹ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 71.

judgment of charity, to look at them as so qualified, and such as had they been called thereunto, would so have acted, their children are to be Baptised.⁹²

Davenport flatly rejects this claim because it bestows membership upon those who are not “actually and regularly Church-members, which is contrary to Christs Ordinance, whereby Baptism, being a publick Church-Ordinance, is onely due to them who have a publick state and Interest, such are onely the Members of the publick Ecclesiastical Body, the Church.”⁹³ To comply with this proposition would be a sacrilege as the circumcision of the Shechemites (Gen. 34) was and the circumcision of Ishmaelites and Edomites would have been. The final proposition reads,

The members of the Orthodox Churches, being sound in the Faith, and not scandalous in life, and presenting due testimony thereof; these occasionally comming from one Church to another, may have their children Baptized in the church whither they come, by virtue of Communion of churches; but if they remove their habitation, they ought orderly to covenant and submit themselves to the Government of Christ in the Church where they settle their abode, and so their children to be Baptised: It being the churches duty to receive such unto communion, so farre as they are regularly fit for the same.⁹⁴

Davenport’s response to this last proposition is that it is ambiguous and that he requires far more clarification of the meaning of the synod’s terminology to properly analyze it.

In sum, the content of *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth* clearly demonstrates that for John Davenport the distinction between immediate and mediate membership was key to his entire argument against the 1662 Boston Synod and the only two biblical legitimate forms of church membership possible. This contention will be further clarified via a summation of the previous four content sections. The first part, proportionally perhaps the most loaded with the references to theologians and their works, suggests that the dissenting minority is by no means guilty of innovation. It defends the character and position of the dissenters as well as refutes the charge of Anabaptism and a lack of

⁹² Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 334; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 46.

⁹³ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 46.

⁹⁴ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 335; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 50.

concern for the souls of children. The fact that the distinction between immediate and mediate membership emerges already in the rebuttal of the second objection shows just how important this distinction was to Davenport's argument and how important it was to authenticate it with Scripture and respected divines. Davenport further supports his conception of membership via distinguishing it from an Anabaptist denial of all infant baptism and affirming a person's ability to dis covenant himself. The second part redirects the charge of innovation back at the synod. *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth* justifies its dissent chiefly by affirming immediate membership as the only biblically legitimate form of adult church-membership and mediate membership as the only biblically legitimate form of infant church-membership. Not only is the meer membership of the synod unscriptural, but the baptism of meer members unfit for the Lord's Supper or their children is a sacrilege. Obviously this excludes the children of those not claiming any membership from baptism as well. Davenport's immediate membership assumes fruits of repentance or some proofs of faith are necessary for an adult to receive baptism and become a church member on the basis of Luke 3:8 and 7:40. For an adult to be fit for baptism, he must also be fit for the Lord's Supper. This is affirmed by Acts 2:41–42 where the promise was only granted to those baptized believers who also devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. Likewise, the postponement of the catechumens' baptism in the early church until fit for the Lord's Supper offers further weight to this contention. Mediate membership is based on Acts 2:41–42 as well because the promise also applied to the children of those baptized and fit for the Lord's Supper. Conversely, if a person is unfit for baptism as an adult, then he cannot entitle his children to what he cannot claim for himself. The third part omits nearly all references to theologians positing a purely biblical approach hereafter. More attention is also given to mediate membership than immediate membership. This part begins by establishing the superiority of Christ and his New Testament ordinances to the Old Testament ordinances and Moses. The purpose of this move is to argue that not only has baptism replaced circumcision as a superior permanent binding ordinance, but that baptism is administered in a different, inner, and more spiritual manner than circumcision. With all this in mind, Davenport appeals to a hermeneutic that grounds the contemporary practice of New Testament ordinances exclusively in the New Testament, to his explication of the circumcision-baptism relationship, and to Acts 2:38–42 in order to prove that New Testament baptism is limited to mediate members

or children of proven believers. This is intended as a direct assault on the synod's attempt to baptize children of those who have not demonstrated faith on the basis of the wider administration of Old Testament circumcision taught in Genesis 17:12–13.⁹⁵ Having sufficiently grounded immediate and mediate membership in his reading of the Bible, Davenport proceeds to dismantle the synod's seven propositions on baptism. Davenport's chief objection is that the synod conflates mediate and immediate membership into a new kind of immediate or personal church-membership via ambiguous language. This new sort of membership granted baptism and was subject to church discipline, but restricted communion and voting until qualified by full membership.⁹⁶ For this reason, Davenport reaffirms the proper subjects of baptism and membership by treating church discipline, the capability of being discovenanted, and the deficient qualifications for synod's membership. Church discipline can only be applied to immediate members not children or adult meer members because it assumes one can be personally removed from the covenant. Likewise, if the baptized does not assume the covenant personally when he becomes an adult, he removes himself from the covenant. Synod's meer membership simply lacks scriptural support and is a poorly constructed solution to the dilemma facing the congregations of New England. Only the continuation of immediate and mediate membership will avoid corruption in the church.

What can be said of Davenport's fundamental distinction between immediate and mediate membership? On the one hand, Christendom has often made distinctions between the way children, catechumens, and confirmed adults have participated in the body of Christ. On the other hand, one can certainly say that Davenport's particular conception of membership is a presupposition that colored the way certain New Englanders read the biblical texts in a manner quite different from other ecclesial traditions and other New Englanders. First of all, Davenport and the Reformed tradition reject baptismal regeneration, which was historically associated with Acts 2:38–42 and other scriptural passages.⁹⁷ Such an understanding of a means of grace helps facilitate the withholding of baptism. He unhistorically assumes that the "for you" and "for your children" from "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off" (Act 2:39) refer to his seventeenth century conception of immediate and mediate membership respectively. There

⁹⁵ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 316.

⁹⁶ Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms*, 318, 325, 327–28.

⁹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.15.2 (2:1304–1305).

is likewise no evidence that a conversion narrative or proof of faith from each of the about three thousand baptized was deemed necessary by the apostles for communing membership in the body of Christ or even occurred on Pentecost day. One also wonders if the recipient of John's baptism, who Davenport dubs as qualified with the fruits of repentance, really would have been qualified by his criteria. Although Davenport rejects any charge of Anabaptism, his understanding of the circumcision-baptism relationship in light of his conception of church membership certainly provides a weaker defense against Anabaptism than is typical among the Reformed. All in all, Davenport illustrates the pivotal role the dissenter theory of membership played in shaping early New England ecclesiology.

In conclusion, the limiting of church membership to the visible saints and of baptism to their children were practices that developed in New England, albeit with earlier antecedents. The new world afforded the Puritans an environment where they were free and able to develop this distinctive practice and a form of Congregationalism that would not have been possible in England. Rooted in the Puritan desire for a visible church more in harmony with the invisible church of the elect and the Puritan morphology of conversion, this restricting of membership arose as a response in New England to emigrants that did not share the Puritan vision of the church. The conversion narrative probably emerged from the 1634 Boston revival preached by John Cotton and eventually became an essential qualification of church membership around 1640. Cotton himself was most likely not responsible for making it an essential qualification for membership. In the wake of the 1662 Boston Synod, which affirmed the concept of meer membership later dubbed the half-way covenant, the minority of pastors and majority of laymen dissented from the counsel of the synod. In light of John Davenport's *Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth*, the key to the dissenters' defense of the limiting of membership to visible saints and their children against the synod was the distinction between immediate and mediate membership along with a rejection of any notion of meer membership. Grounding this distinction in an early New England Puritan interpretation of Scripture and certain respected theologians, he argued that immediate membership is the only biblical form of adult membership and can only be granted by a proof of regeneration. In the same way, mediate membership is the only biblical form of infant membership and only be given by believing parents. If a child does not eventually take hold of the covenant, (i.e., become a personal full

immediate member of the church able to commune, vote, and experience church discipline), then he is discovenanted and so are any children that he might have. With this in mind, he defends the credibility of the dissenters, suggests the synod is the real innovator, and refutes the synod's seven propositions that affirmed meer membership as a pollution of the visible church.

The history of ecclesiology can be truly fascinating. But this area of study, which often produces a wealth of valuable information for both the theologian and historian alike, is in need of more extensive scholarship today. It is the hope of this analysis of New England Puritan ecclesiology to encourage more work in the study of seventeenth century ecclesiology. [LSQ](#)

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Trees and Chaff

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Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You that we were planted by the rivers of water, Jesus Christ, through our baptismal faith and that that wonderful river continues to flow to us in Word and Supper, bearing abundant fruit. O Lord, keep us from ever being separated from the waters so that we become no more than chaff which the wind drives away. Rather, continue to bring us to the waters in the means of grace. This we ask in the name of the water of life, our dear Lord Jesus. Amen.

Text: *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. (Psalm 1, NKJV)*

I WAS BORN IN WESTERN MINNESOTA WHERE A tree was a rather infrequent sight, and on a clear day a person could see forever, or at least to the South Dakota border. Then we moved to Okauchee, Wisconsin, where the roads are almost covered by the trees, and I could not really tell what my next door neighbor's house looks like. At first my wife felt claustrophobic, and I always wondered

what they were hiding behind all those trees. I still appreciate the wide open spaces and the wheat fields of St. Paul, but I have come to treasure the lush luxuriant green woodlands. The massive forests and woodland areas have a serenity and security that is beyond compare. The beauty of the trees all around us caught the imagination of David, the holy writer, of this psalm for he speaks of the believer as a tree planted by the river of waters. We then consider: **Trees and Chaff: a picture of two kinds of people.**

I. Asking first in what do they delight? David in the text speaks of two distinct categories of people. It is not a distinction based on age, race, sex, or income bracket. It is a distinction based on the attitude of the heart. David writes, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law he meditates day and night” (1:1–2). This one knows his lost condition by nature and knows that he is always in danger of falling back into those sinful ways. Therefore, he wants no part in the advice of the godless, what the people might say. He avoids the pathway of sinners even though his old sinful flesh yearns to follow that path, because he knows that it will only hurt him and those around him, and its end is destruction. He stays away from the seats of the scornful because the cynical discussions only lead to despair.

The person who is truly blessed daily returns to his Baptism where he was rooted in the life-giving Word by faith alone in the Savior. He repents of his sins throwing them back into the baptismal water, and goes forth in the resurrection power of Christ which comes to him through Baptism.

This one delights in the Law of the Lord, His wonderful Word. His life centers on the old, old story of Jesus and His love. There is no greater expression of love. Jesus left heaven’s high throne and became man in the blessed Virgin Mary’s womb for our salvation. We were all on the path of sinners and destined for slaughter in hell. But in love, amazingly he took our place, living a holy life for us and suffering the death of deaths, the pain of hell, so that we could live forever in heaven’s fair home. He became as we are sharing in our suffering, pain, and hell so that we could become as He is sharing in His life, glory, and heaven.

That wonderful history of Jesus and His love assures us of His love and support right now. If He already gave His life for us on the cross and chose us as His own in Baptism, then we can be certain that He will

be with us all the way in this life upholding us by the right hand of His righteousness. The believer will meditate on the Word day and night, for here the Lord comes to us and gives us the strength to overcome the conflicts of life through Him. The Word is sweeter than the honeycomb for the believer because it is the power-source of our life (Psalm 19:10). Every other prop and support can give way, but the Word of the Lord and His Sacraments will be our foundation in life and in death.

The ungodly one, on the other hand, delights only in satisfying himself. He makes the center of his life himself and not the Lord, and so spends his life pampering and indulging self. He mocks the way of the righteous and follows the path of sinners. He scornfully says, "Why study the Bible and gather for worship, there are so many better things to do with your time? Why support the Lord's kingdom, you need your wealth for yourself? Why live a moral life, it gets you nowhere?" Yet such a lifestyle is totally meaningless and its end is destruction.

II. Now we want to ask what fruit do they each produce? Concerning those who continually meditate on the life-giving Word, David writes, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (1:3). Here God depicts the believer as a tree planted by abundant waters. When faith was worked in our heart through Baptism, we were planted by the river of water, Jesus Christ. He is the water of life that can satisfy our every longing and desire.

As God's trees, like all trees we need moisture. Without it a tree can only die. If we are cut off from the water we will dry up, wither and fade away. The way that the water of life, Jesus Christ, is channeled to us is through the Word and Sacraments. Concerning these means of grace Isaiah encourages, "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters" (Isaiah 55:1). This is the water that the Spirit of God uses to soak our roots, to keep God's trees alive, and to cause them to grow.

God's trees, when planted by the river of water which flows to us through the means of grace, will be productive. Down Wisconsin Avenue from the church stand many stately trees, all leafed out and alive with beautiful green. Interspersed with them are some splintered, weather-beaten utility poles. Those poles stand tall and are made of the same material, but are merely lifeless wood sunk into the ground. Only the trees are green and productive bearing fruit because they are sustained by the water flowing to them in the soil. Are we only lifeless utility poles bearing no fruit because we have no roots in the water

of life? Are we just gray ugly poles taking up space? In a world where utility poles are rapidly on the increase, where lives are bleak and cold and selfish, may we draw deeply from the well of water in the means of grace, bearing abundant fruit of love and compassion to all around us.

Isaiah speaks of God's trees as willows upon the stream of waters (Isaiah 44:4). Some have thought that the holy writer could have picked a better tree to describe the believer under the influence of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Still, the willow gives us a very interesting picture. The willow can grow into quite a mighty tree, but we often see the willow mutilated, topped and hindered in its growth. Yet, with its indomitable tenacity, it is able to endure all manner of abuse, and still produce new shoots and branches. This is indeed an apt picture of the child of God who is fresh and vibrant, even in tribulation and persecution. They are beaten, mutilated, beheaded and burned to death. Yet they bear fruit of love and compassion, and the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, an amazing picture of indestructible life.¹

The ungodly are not so, but are like chaff which the wind blows away (1:4). There is nothing more worthless than chaff. When it comes out of the back of the combine it just blows in the wind, good for nothing. On hot humid days it sticks to your sweaty back and makes you feel itchy and miserable. The dust gets in your lungs and you cough for hours. That is what the person without Christ is like. He life is worthless. The self-centered person who cares only for his own personal pleasure makes those around him as miserable as the farmer working in chaff and grain dust on a hot humid day. He bears no fruit of love and compassion.

III. What kind of end then can the chaff and the trees expect?

Concerning the ungodly who are worthless as chaff our text says, "They shall not stand in the judgment" (1:5) What a horrible pronouncement. Not only is their life meaningless here, but their end is destruction in hell. God forbid that any of us here have allowed our lives to turn to chaff which the winds of God's fury will drive away to everlasting fire. Fathers, on this our special day, have we been raising our families like utility poles separated from the waters in the means of grace? Or worse, have we allowed all our families to become chaff which will be consumed in the oven of God's wrath?

It is not too late! Use this Father's Day to bring our families to the waters. Come to the water all you who thirst. Jesus is the water

¹ J. M. Reu, *Thomasius Old Testament Selections with Interpretation and Homiletical Adaptation*, trans. Max Steuer (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1959), 411.

of life. May we each repent of our failures and sins, trust alone in His perfect redemption, and allow His reviving waters to soak in our hearts through the holy Word and blessed Sacraments. In Jesus there is full and complete forgiveness of every sin. Then we won't be dead utility poles just taking up space, but we will be willow trees bearing abundant fruit, even when we are beat against and broken down by the winds of outrageous fortune and persecution. Finally our end will be heaven's fair home where there is a stream that makes glad the city of God (Psalm 46:4). God is in her midst for Jesus is the stream, and there we will be planted by the river of waters forevermore, where joy and peace will know no end. Amen. LSQ

Sermon on Psalm 97

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Prayer: O almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all dangers and necessities stretch forth Your mighty hand to defend us against our enemies; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Text: *The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!² Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.³ Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around.⁴ His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles.⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.⁶ The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.⁷ All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods!⁸ Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD.⁹ For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.¹⁰ O you who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.¹¹ Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.¹² Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name! (Psalm 97; ESV).*

IT MUST HAVE TAKEN A SPECIAL SORT OF chutzpah (i.e., Jewish boldness) for the Israelites to sing this psalm. The historical record surely wasn't on their side. After 732 BC, the

Israelites were almost continually under the jackboot of foreign rulers. For all intents and purposes, it appeared that the God of Israel had been defeated first by the gods of the Assyrians, next the Babylonians, followed by the Medes and Persians. And then there are those of the Greeks and Romans....

But let's forget about the Israelites for a moment. Is it wise for us to keep meditating on this psalm? By doing so, it will inevitably slip into our conversations, change the way we live our lives, and expose us as Christians. When Jesus confessed that he was the king of Psalm 97, they crucified him. When Christians have made his confession their own, Muslims have beheaded them. Then there's those increasing efforts to root out Christianity by means of legislation and reeducation. But if we are starting to question the cost of discipleship, then we need Psalm 97 to refill us with that chutzpah once more. The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!

Psalm 97 wasn't written for untested Christians. It was meant for those who felt God's justice was being snuffed out. It is addressed especially to those oppressed for the faith. Psalm 97 is a cry of resistance. It's our fight song if you will. It says to every religious oppressor: "Do your worst for Christ our King will vindicate us! He reigns even now. All you've done is squander your time of grace. And if you keep warring against him, you'll only behold a terrible and awful spectacle when he comes again in glory." Our text says: "Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all around. His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. ⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth."

When Christ the King returns on judgement day, St. Paul tell us "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow of those on earth, and those under the earth" (Philippians 2:10-11). Clearly all angels and believers will bend the knee in adoration of our King. But the psalmist says that the demons and unbelievers will be brought to their knees as well. They too will acknowledge "Jesus is LORD," but as a shame-filled capitulation. This is what is meant by "All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods!" To put it simply, unbelievers unknowingly serve demons. St. Paul states: "No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice [to idols] they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons" (1 Corinthians 10:19-20). No one in their right mind would bet on a demon over against the Sovereign LORD. And yet on the last

day, many will watch in horror as the gods they had championed are revealed to be devils.

But before we get too wrapped up in Christ's flag, we had better be sure we aren't numbered among the idolaters. The psalmist says the righteous are those that hate evil. Now it's not so much the evil that disgusts us that we need worry about. No, it's all that evil we no longer fear that's so dangerous for us. Whenever an evil is deliberately chosen, it replaces God in our heart until we repent of it. One evil that can so easily become such is our cultural infatuation with malcontentedness. We are not only unsatisfied with our own lives, but we are also unsatisfied with everyone else. And yet somehow, we think that we can gain satisfaction in our lives by finding new ways to scrutinize the lives of others. Satan was quite ingenious when he designed malcontentedness. He's got us continually serving his agenda, all the while we think that we are serving our agenda, all at the expense everyone else. You see, there is no middle ground between God and the devil. You're either a citizen of heaven or a slave of hell.

When I was child, I remember one of the first times I gained some sense of the injustices of the world. At that moment a well-meaning old timer tried to give me some much needed perspective. I must have been very exasperating that day because the old timer finally told me, "Don't worry about it kid, God will get even!" I took much solace in that phrase. I liked the idea that all the bad guys eventually get their comeuppance. It even seemed to resonate with Psalm 97. But herein God tells us to hate the evil, not the sinner. Elsewhere he says, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). Now Christ could have subjugated us like death did. But he chose to make peace between God and man instead. He did this by freeing us from our conscription in death's army and making us whole again. If anyone had reason to be malcontent, it was Christ. His sole purpose in life was to be the scapegoat for mankind. This is why it is so surprising that he willingly went to the slaughter without lodging a single complaint against us. If that weren't surprising enough, our sacrificial lamb turned out to be a divine Trojan horse! By allowing death to consume him on the cross, he broke upon death's prison house, freeing us forever from death's terrible grasp.

After delivering us, he reconciled and preserved us. Not only that, he gives us the power to remain free of malcontentedness and become shalom (or peaceful and whole) again. Every time we make the psalms are own, the old troll (death seeded) in us dies and a renewed human

being bursts forth. This is the function of Psalm 97 in our lives. It's sort of like Christian Kung Fu. When the late great Bruce Lee was asked to define his Kung Fu, he called it, "The art of fighting without fighting" (*Enter the Dragon*, 1973). Likewise the goal of Psalm 97 is to fight our oppressors without fighting them. This is why Psalm 97 is so dangerous to the sinful establishment. For those that regularly mediate upon it will be transformed. Those, that are transformed, will transform others. By continually fighting without fighting, our oppressors are eventually disarmed and transformed as well.

Light is indeed sown for the righteous. We are the children of the light empowered to reflect Christ's light upon the world. For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.... Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name! Amen. LSQ

Sermon on John 8:3–11

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Text: *Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” (John 8:3–11, NKJV)*

HAS SOMEONE CHEATED ON YOU BEFORE? Maybe in high school? Maybe here at college? Maybe it was by the person you thought you’d get engaged to and marry? Maybe it has happened to you while married? And if you haven’t been cheated on in an intimate relationship like dating or marriage, chances are you’ve been cheated on or betrayed in some other way: gossip, slander, you name it.

How did you feel when you were cheated on or betrayed in that relationship? My guess is hurt; filled with anger; filled with hatred; held a grudge. And chances are, in that moment, it felt something like this: You felt sick to your stomach; as if someone took out a knife and was stabbing your heart repeatedly. And when you thought they were about done, they tore open your chest cavity and ripped out your heart so they could stab it all over again.

If that's something like how we feel when we've been cheated on or betrayed by another, why do we turn around and cause others to feel that same way as we hurt others with our sin. We don't want our hearts ripped out by others, but we don't have a problem doing that to them.

In addition we certainly have no issue ripping out the heart of our Triune God and stabbing it with our many sins. Every day, the Lord gives us all we need for this body and life, but we respond like the Israelites of old, we go **a whoring after other gods** (Judges 2:17, KJV). Our sinful nature prostitutes itself out to everything this world wants to offer: a quick high, a bottle to numb the pain and senses, a meaningless Tinder hookup to forget the last person who cheated on or betrayed us. God gives us all we need each day, but we'd rather listen to our adulterous sinful nature and **go a whoring** after the empty gods this world offers.

Speaking of adultery, the Scribes and Pharisees brought Jesus a woman caught in the act of sexual intercourse with a man who wasn't her husband. They approached Jesus reeking of self-righteousness! Yes, this woman had been caught in adultery, but Moses had said (Leviticus 20; Deuteronomy 22) that the man should have been brought for judgement too. They made her appear before both Jesus and those He was teaching in the Temple, an absolutely unnecessary act of humiliation. They didn't care about this woman's soul, their sinful pride and self-righteousness was too busy setting a trap!

See they thought they were smarter than the Son of God because they only saw the Son of Mary. They thought they'd finally trap Jesus and with no way to escape! This time He couldn't outsmart them because this trap revolved around adultery, one of the gravest sins, and there wasn't only one or two, but three chances He'd answer wrong and destroy Himself:

1) Since the beginning of His ministry, Jesus had become known as the **Friend of Sinners**. If He said she must die according to the law of Moses, Jesus would lose the love and following of these sinners and great crowds, and the Friend of Sinners He would be no more!

2) And if Jesus recommended death for this woman, He'd find Himself in trouble for speaking against Roman law. Only Roman officials had the right to pass and carry out death sentences; for Jesus to say He had that same power would make him a criminal in the eyes of Pilate and Caesar.

3) But just in case this still wasn't enough, there was one more way He'd crucify Himself: if Jesus even dared to think He could pardon this woman, He'd be teaching these people—in the Temple, mind you!—that they should break the laws of Moses; that the Son of Mary was greater than the Lord's greatest Old Testament prophet. How could they ever lose?

So what did Jesus do in this seemingly no-win situation? **Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear** (8:6). We don't know why Jesus did what He did here. Some have said, He did this to have them repeat themselves (8:7) in the hopes they'd realize what they were doing. Some wonder if we should focus on the Greek word *to write* here to understand. *To write* in this context can mean *to write down a record of charges against someone*. Were those who were ready to pick up and throw stones now fearfully watching Jesus write their secret sins on the ground? We just don't know.

What we do know is this: **[Jesus] raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first"** (8:7). Understand the meaning of **without sin**. The word Jesus used here literally meant without sin and without sinful desire! Knowing that, how could anyone standing there and not walk away and drop their stones? So much for a perfect trap!

Then we hear Jesus say to this woman, **"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more"** (8:11). Please don't think Jesus was making light of this woman's sin or that it wasn't a big deal. It was! But it was no lesser or greater than the man's sin who was the other half of this adultery, or the self-righteousness and pride of the Scribes and Pharisees, or your sins or mine. Sin is always serious! What Jesus did here was He deferred the sentence for this and all her sins.

How could He do that? The answer lies in the irony that was the Scribes' and Pharisees' plan. Their plan to trap Mary's Son may have been idiotic, but at the same time, it just happened to be prophetic in terms of God's Son.

God's Son didn't just earn the title the Friend of Sinners because of His teaching; Jesus embodied being the Friend of Sinners in every one of His thoughts, words, and deeds as He lived a holy life for all sinners.

God's Son never taught against God's Law given to Moses but fulfilled it perfectly in every aspect so that this woman would receive true pardon and forgiveness from God Himself. He also did this so that each of us hearing this today can receive true pardon and forgiveness from God Himself for all the times we've ripped out His heart when we've chased after and loved the gods of this world instead of Him.

And once Jesus had perfectly accomplished those things, then God's Son willingly became the worst criminal for this woman, for you, me, and all people, taking on the deferred sentences for all sin. And when Rome looked at Jesus on Good Friday, they saw, the worst criminal, and according to Roman law, Pontius Pilate passed and carried out the appropriate death sentence—a cruel and painful death on the cross.

But Jesus endured it all, including hell itself, so that when He rose on Easter He'd forever be the Friend of Sinners, the Prophet Greater than Moses, and the Victorious Christ. Jesus endured it all so He could look at this woman and say, "**Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more**" (8:11).

Folks, as I stand before you right now, I want you to understand, and I pray you believe what I'm about to say. By faith you're a redeemed child of God. The payment and punishment for your sins isn't in deferment; it has been washed away by the blood of Christ. Therefore, no matter the sins you've committed in the past—it doesn't matter what you've went a whoring after, it doesn't matter what you have prostituted yourself out to—by faith in Christ you can walk out of here this morning with the same assurance, comfort, and hope in your life that this woman left the Temple with that day. Your Savior doesn't condemn you because He was condemned for you. In the same way He wrote on the ground here, He has now taken His finger and written His name on your heart in water and Word, and continues to write His name on your heart each day through His means of grace. You are His own, and He gives us His strength and His power so we can now go, and no longer sin like we were before we came to Him this morning. Amen. LSQ



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