China Lutheran Seminary

Master of Theology Thesis

Preach the Freedom in Christ – Getting Beyond the Purported Impasse with the Law-Gospel Preaching

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中華信義神學院
神學碩士學位論文
考試委員審定書

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Preach the Freedom in Christ - Getting Beyond the Purported Impasse with the Law-Gospel Preaching

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中 華 民 國 一 〇 九 年 七 月 三 日

…this Epistle is instruction in the Christian living toward God and people, namely, that we let God be everything to us and that we be everything for other people, so that we are to other people what God is to us. We receive from God and give to people, which summed up in words “faith and love.”

—Martin Luther, Fourth Sunday in Advent, Philippians 4:4-7
Luther’s Works, Volume 75 (Church Postils I) 171.

中華信義神學院

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論文題目：**傳基督裡的自由—律法與福音架構下傳講勸勉的挑戰**

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在路德神學的律法與福音講道模式中，存在著一種所謂的「僵局」: 即同時要肯定「律法的總結(end)就是基督」及「律法(第三種功用)是基督徒生活的指導」。這種困境體現在傳講勸勉(paraenesis)的困難上。

本文從馬丁·路德的《基督徒的自由》中神學特色的洞見角度，探討這方面的爭議：基督徒是全然自由的眾人之主；又是全然服從的眾人之僕。這弔詭的主張，恰與此處所謂的「僵局」相對應。路德在「同為義人和罪人」的處境中處理這自由的議題：根據聖經描述，一個基督徒裡面，同時動態性地存在著一個完美的新人和一個無可救藥的舊人。每當福音的傳揚激發信心，新人就會勝過舊人。當信心運作時，基督徒不僅被動地領受基督的義，他還主動的行義，在愛中服事鄰舍。這種「信心透過愛而有的動力」，使人可以完全自由地行出聖經所勸勉的善行。

本文認為，傳講勸勉本質上就是宣講福音的自由。人們經常需要聽福音，因為他們經常忘記福音。當人們需要靈性上的關顧時，我們就以合宜的方式向他們傳講，使福音自然的應用在他們實際的生活中。這就是傳講勸勉之道，其中並無「僵局」，因為從傳講到行出來，始終是在完全的自由之中。

我們分析了新約中的一卷講章性的書信《腓立比書》，以檢驗以上的概念，結果發現它們的確都與該書傳講勸勉的方式相符。

CHINA LUTHERAN SEMINARY

ABSTRACT

PREACH THE FREEDOM IN CHRIST – GETTING BEYOND THE PURPORTED IMPASSE WITH THE LAW-GOSPEL PREACHING

by

Nong-Ruay Chen

July 2020

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DEGREE: MASTER OF THEOLOGY

In the Lutheran law-gospel preaching paradigm, there is an alleged "impasse" between affirming Christ as the end of the law and the law (in its "third use") as a guide for Christian life. This dilemma is manifested in the difficulties in preaching "paraenesis", which includes exhortation, rebuke and instruction, etc..

In this study, we approach the controversial issues from the perspective of Martin Luther's theological insights and distinctives found in his 1520 Treatise "*The Freedom of a Christian*". The paradox that a Christian is both *a completely free lord of all* and *a completely dutiful servant of all* corresponds exactly to the alleged impasse in question. Luther tackles the issues of freedom in the context of the *simul*. According to the biblical imagery that a perfect new man and an irreparable old man co-exist dynamically in a Christian, the new man prevails over the old whenever faith is awakened by the preaching of the gospel. When faith operates, the Christian does not only receive the righteousness of Christ passively; he also does righteous works actively to serve his neighbor in love. This "faith active through love" results in good works according to biblical paraeneses done in complete freedom.

It is argued in this study that preaching paraenesis is essentially preaching the gospel freedom. People need to hear the gospel every day, because they forget it everyday. When people need spiritual counsels, including rebukes, instructions and guidance, we preach the gospel in sensible ways that is readily applicable to their real life. This is paraenesis preaching. There is no "impasse" because what is preached and done is always in complete freedom.

A "sermonic" Epistle in the New Testament, the Philippians, is analyzed to check the validity of the concepts established. They are all found to be compatible with the biblical ways of preaching paraenesis in this Epistle.

Acknowledgements

One realization through the thesis writing process is that the “acknowledgements” no longer appear to me as a mere formalism. There are just too many people to be grateful for.

I am deeply thankful for the two advisors I am privileged to have for one Master degree. Dr. Jukka A. Kääriäinen guided me to start the study, provided me with thoughtful advice continually and rescued me often from wandering astray in theological focus, organization and methodology; until he was called back to Finland for another demanding ministry by his Missions. I was then mentored by Dr. Thomas Yu to continue and finish the study, and has since benefited from his tremendous wisdom as a veteran pastor in addition to his outstanding scholarship. In addition to clarifying my understanding of many aspects of the subject matters, his timely advice repeatedly guided me out of my own blind spots.

I thank my two committee members who proved that an oral defense is far more than an appendix to conclude the thesis writing process. Dr. Joe Schmid’s has enriched me with highly helpful comments on both my overall themes and detailed theological nuances. He has demonstrated to me the precious attitude of rigorous scholarship. Dr. Michael Paul, as the outside reader, helped me to see things from different angles and clarify many basic ideas about the topics.

I also owe a big debt of gratitude to the deceased Dr. Armin Buchholz, who founded the Graduate School of Lutheran Study at the China Lutheran Seminary, and strongly urged me to enroll in the program. In retrospect, I am extremely grateful for his push. Many appreciations also go to the faculty and staff members at the Seminary.

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Deep gratitude must be expressed to my dear wife Yi-Ping for her unreserved support and understanding. She truly deserves a degree of PHT. She and my three dearly loved children have always been my joy and motivation throughout the time of my study.

Table of Contents

Chinese Abstract ……..…i

English Abstract ……ii

Acknowledgements …….....iii

Table of Contents …….. v

Abbreviations …….....ix

Introduction

Research Statement …….....1

Approach and Methods ……....3

Limitations on the Scope of this Study …….. 6

Chapter One The Uninvited Impasse of the Law-Gospel Preaching

Section One Law and Gospel—The Necessary Distinction ……9

Section Two The Big Issue—Paraenesis … ……..16

Section Three The "Impasse" of Preaching Paraenesis …… 25

Chapter Two Which is God's Last Word?

Section One Other Approaches to the Law-Gospel Paradigm ……..... 31

Section Two The General and the Endowed Meanings of the Terms …34

Section Three The Primacy of the Gospel……..38

Section Four The "*Simul*" and the Last Word Debate ……45

Appendix The Choice of the Term "Paraenesis" …….. 49

Chapter Three The *Simul* and Justification

Section One The *Simul* and a Fuller Experience of Freedom ……55

Section Two The Link between the *Simul* and Justification ……..57

Section Three The Perfect New Man and the Irreparable Old Man …..60

Chapter Four The *Simul* and Faith Alone

Section One Life in the *Simul* …….66

Section Two Faith Alone – What Does It Mean? …….. 70

Section Three The Dynamics of Faith ……77

Chapter Five Good Works and Paraenesis

Section One Good Works and the *Simul* ……90

Section Two Faith Alone and Good works …… 92

Section Three Works to Discipline Oneself …….. 99

Section Four The Two Kinds of Righteousness ……105

Section Five The Cross, Self-Denial and Loving our Neighbor …….. 114

Section Six A Brief Summary — Luther's Theology of Paraenesis Preaching…….. …….. …… 127

Chapter Six Paraenesis in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

Section One New Testament Epistles and Paraeneses ……..130

Section Two Law and Gospel in the Epistle of Philippians…….. 131

Section Three Paraenesis that Builds Up Faith …….140

Section Four Paraenesis for Good Works ……..153

Section Five Summary of Paraenesis in Philippians ……165

Section Six Assessing Luther's Paraenesis in Light of Philippians 167

Conclusion …….....172

Bibliography …….....178

Abbreviations

ESV Unless otherwise specified, biblical texts quoted in this thesis are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2001.

LW Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, American ed. vols. 1-55, 56-60, 67-69, 75-79. Philadelphia: Fortress, St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–2016.

The Lutheran Confessions cited in this Thesis:

BOC	The Book of Concord
AC	The Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
SA	The Smalcald Articles
FC Ep	Formula of Concord, Epitome
FC SD	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration

Unless otherwise stated, all references to the Lutheran Confessions are from the English texts of the *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: German-Latin-English*. *Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921) [Online]. Available: http://bookofconcord.org/.

EDNT Balz, Horst and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

MESD Mickelson, Jonathan K. *Mickelson's Enhanced Strong's Dictionaries of the Greek and Hebrew Testaments*. Kennesaw, GA: LivingSon Press, 2008.

TNTC Morris, Leon, ed., *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965.

Introduction

Objective

The objective of this study is to help preachers of God's Word overcome an alleged "impasse"[1] related to the Lutheran law-gospel homiletical paradigm in order to preach the conclusion of a sermon with practical applications boldly and freely.

Research Statement

One of the major distinctives of the Reformation is Luther's insight of the distinction between law and gospel—that different portions of the Scriptures serve different functions & purposes. This insight not only significantly impacted the general theological understanding at the time of the Reformation,[2] but has also been helping preachers of the Word to "rightly handle the Word of truth", and to avoid errors of legalism, moralism or antinomianism.[3]

However, when preachers follow the apparent paradigm of first convicting sins with the law, and then liberating the guilty conscience with the gospel of saving grace,

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[1] This term is employed in, for example, Hannan, Shauna Kay, "Lutheran preachers and the third use of the law: A homiletical approach to overcome the impasse" (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2011). Also, see Mark C. Mattes, "Beyond the Impasse: Re-examining the Third Use of the Law," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 69 (2005): 271-291.

[2] For example, one of Luther's most convincing arguments in his debate against Erasmus' concept of human free will is the distinction between law and gospel. See Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will" in *Luther and Erasmus: Freewill and Salvation,* E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, eds. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 194-200.

[3] For a classical introduction, see C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929). See also John T. Pless, *Handling the Word of Truth* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015). Chinese translation: 普益世著，分解真理的道，王萌譯（新竹：路德傳產基金會 2018）.

there seems to be little room left for applications such as admonishments, exhortations for action or ethical instructions in Christian life. Any such attempt would seem to undermine the impact of the gospel already preached, and risk a reversion back to the works of the law. This is why less a generation later, after Luther's death in 1546, the *Formula of Concord* (1577) was drawn up and included in the later part of the *Book of Concord*. It assigns "*the third use*" to the law (Article VI). That is, in addition to "curbing" unruly conduct (the first use) and convicting sin (the second use), the law also guides Christians to lead a godly life—which is the law's **third use**., by which the regenerate might "*have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life*".[4]

Despite the unambiguous confessional stance, the hesitation and controversies have persisted. For the same reasons the *Formula* was first drafted, there have been some theologians through the subsequent centuries who just don't feel comfortable with the idea of law "after" the gospel.[5] Some argue that the "third use" is none other than the first and second uses, only that it is applicable and addressed to the regenerated Christians; thus rendering an additional "third use" superfluous and unhelpful. Moreover, while down-playing the third use of the law might lead to antinomianism and licentiousness; overemphasizing it improperly could risk the old medieval errors of legalism and moralism. And indecision on the issue always breeds the deadly old foe of hypocrisy, hidden behind seemingly orthodox doctrines.[6] In the core of the controversies is an "*impasse*"—that is, a deadlock of disagreements

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[4] FC Ep VI. 1.

[5] *Ibid*., "*[a] dissension has occurred between some few theologians concerning the third use of the Law, namely, whether it is to be urged or not upon regenerate Christians. The one side has said, Yea; the other, Nay.*"

[6] A historical summary of these controversies can be found in Scott R. Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002).

"*between the affirmations that Christ is the end of the law for faith versus that the law is a guide for Christian life*".[7] In other words, there exist unbridgeable disparities among various positions that, since the gospel is the last word of God to His people,[8] do we really need an additional law (in its third use) for practical instructions? And if we do, how do we use it properly so that the gospel remains the last word of God?

This is not only academically controversial among scholars. It is of more immediate concern for pastors and preachers, who are perplexed about how to provide the flocks in their care with pure spiritual food concerning practices in Christian life. It is particularly perplexing for non-Lutheran preachers who somewhat feel the importance of law and gospel in biblical texts, yet do not know how to rightly handle it in preaching. An example is the predominantly non-denominational Chinese churches in North America. Many seminary-trained Chinese pastors are capable to exercise exegesis and preach a theologically sustainable sermon until the conclusion part, where they would mandate some typical Confucian, moralistic platitudes for application. Such advice of self-willed endeavor would weaken, if not altogether cancel, the power of the law and gospel preached. When they are corrected and made aware of such a weakness, they do not know how to deal with it except becoming restrained and hesitant to preach any applications at all. The paradigm of distinguishing law and gospel has thus unwittingly created a "homiletical impasse"[9] that preachers do not know if, and/or how, they should preach ethical applications and good works concerning Christian living.

It is observed, however, that Martin Luther, although ardently maintaining the

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[7] Mark C. Mattes, "Beyond the Impasse: Re-examining the Third Use of the Law," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 69 (2005): 272.

[8] The "last word" issue is discussed in chapter two of this study.

[9] See footnote 1.

distinction between law and gospel in all circumstances, never hesitated to encourage, admonish, rebuke and instruct Christians with practical directives for Christian living and good works. Such contents sometimes even take the major role in his sermons. How could he possibly become immune to the "impasse" that haunts preachers today? It is thus the interest of this study to look deeper into **Luther's "secret" of preaching applications** in his theological works and other writings with the hope to discover why he is able to do so with such confidence.

Approach and Methods

The debates over the third use of the law have often been academic in essence and centering around doctrinal nuances. Although some works start with the aim of tackling preaching and related homiletical issues, the approach is still basically philosophical discussions about homiletics.[10] For pastors and preachers in general, many of the academic debates are too theoretical and too remote to be put right into practice. The dilemma of whether ethical life applications should be preached in order to avoid antinomianism; and if yes, how to do it properly to be safe from the errors of legalism and moralism, further confounds the issues and discourages common preachers.

Thus, this study attempts to approach the subject from a more practical aspect. Instead of first taking a stand on the theological debates over the third use of the law, we will ponder upon the distinct reasons and thoughts that enable Luther to preach practical applications in Christian life so freely and boldly while still maintaining a firm emphasis on the law-gospel distinction. What empowers Luther should also

[10] For example, Shauna K. Hannan, "Lutheran preachers and the third use of the law: A homiletical approach to overcome the impasse". Also, Kyo Don Joo, "A Homiletic Geared Towards Ethical Living: An Examination of Gospel and the Third Use of the Law with Relation to the Divine and Human Roles in Sanctification" (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael's College, 2014).

enable us to preach confidently, without the aforementioned impasse and proneness to errors.

When we contemplate on issues from this perspective, it soon becomes evident that it is not any specific method or technique, but Luther's strong conviction of and deep confidence in **the power and efficacy of the gospel**; that liberates him to preach applications boldly without the worry of weakening it. This conviction is manifested in a variety of Luther's **doctrinal distinctives** during the time of the Reformation, as will be elaborated in chapter three to five. These distinctives are **different facets of his holistic biblical conviction and theological passions**, crystallized through ongoing prayers, meditations and struggles with trials and temptations throughout his own life.[11] Only a sure grasp of these spiritual tenets can help us preach confidently. Therefore, as much as we intend to be down-to-earthly practical, we do not hold the illusion that we can preach like Martin Luther without a genuine appreciation of his theological insights. We can not construct any simplistic formulas, rules, models, or develop sophisticated methods and techniques of preaching, apart from sincerely sharing Luther's heartfelt zeal for the good news and his indignation against erroneous Scripture manipulations. In short, central to our task is Luther's compassionate theology, not certain wonder-working methods.[12]

Consequently, our endeavor in the following study is to discover Luther's theological footing for his boldness in preaching practical applications. In the following

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[11] Luther found three rules for studying theology from Ps. 119, "I want to point out to you a correct way of studying theology, for I have had practice in that. . . They are *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*." *LW* 34:285. Also see his "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses," thesis 15. *LW* 31:125–30, esp. 129.

[12] This approach of interpreting Luther is echoed widely among Lutheran scholars. See, for example, Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). In "*The Freedom of a Christian*", Luther stresses that we are not to "read about Christ", but "Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in Him may be established that He may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me". *LW* 31:357.

chapters, we will employ the term "**paraenesis**"[13] to denote practical sermon applications. While such applications as ethical instructions and good works of love can often be properly categorized under "the third use of the law", we will more frequently unbralla them under "paraenesis" instead. This English word is derived from the Greek verb "*παραινέω*" (Acts 27:9, 22), which is translated into "exhort", "urge", "advise" or "admonish" in various English Bible versions. The reasons to deliberately employ a rarely used term in this study will be explained later after the discussions on God's last Word in chapter two.[14]

Now we come back to the issue of Luther's confidence in preaching. With appropriately selected original writings by Luther himself, we will try to grasp Luther's spiritual fervor and his passions for the gospel. Certain relevant Scripture resources in the New Testament and some preaching/teaching works by Luther himself are examined to check and verify the findings. The conclusions of the study will be summarized into concise, practical guidelines, not in the form of formulas or specific models, but as "paraeneses" themselves—advices, entreaties, admonitions, instructions and reminders of essential theological tenets for today's preachers to rightly handle the Word of truth.

Limitations on the Scope of this Study

A comprehensive research of all relevant topics of Reformation theologies would be way beyond the scope of this single study. And even if that could be done,

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[13] "Paraenesis" is a term derived from the Greek verb *παραινέω* (Acts 27:9, 22, Strong's number 3867), which means "admonish, exhort". A related expression is "paraklesis", corresponding to the far more frequently used New Testament Greek word παράκλησις (Strong number G 3874), meaning comfort or consolation. Though not popular expressions in English, they are closely related to the ideas of "the third use of the law", and any one of these terms can represent the essence of sermon applications. The reasons we prefer the use of the term "paraenesis" in this study to "the third use of the law" and "paraklesis" will be explained in next chapter after the discussions of God's last Word.

[14] See the appendix to chapter two, pp.49-53.

it would yield results that are extremely cumbersome to be of any practical value—how can a preacher take all these vastly diverse doctrinal concerns into consideration in one single sermon, in additional to his/her faithful, painstaking exegesis and careful hermeneutical study of the text? In order to make our study feasible and the result useful, we must narrow down its scope, impose certain restraints and be selective in the choice of raw materials. Fortunately, this process does not have to be arbitrary and artificial. Luther has done it himself for us in one of his brilliant works, that is, the famous treatise written in 1520—"*The Freedom of a Christian*",[15] which can readily serve our purposes neatly.

Summing up the whole *treatise* are two major propositions:

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none.
A Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.

These two propositions, seemingly contradictory, are in reality completely compatible; and they are both grounded in the Christian freedom availed by the gospel. It sounds paradoxical. Yet that paradox, upon closer inspection, is intimately related to our "impasse" in preaching paraenesis! The first proposition of "the most free lord of all" reminds us of that "*Christ is the end of the law"* (Rom.10:4); while the second, *"the most dutiful servant to all"* points us to the true *law of Christ* (Gal. 6:2) which is "*a guide for Christian life*".[16] These are parallel to the two sides of our paradoxical impasse. Throughout the whole *treatise* Luther offers crucial doctrinal insights, resolving the tensions involved in the paradox one after another and ultimately bringing both propositions into harmony in the gospel freedom. This correlation, which will be explained further in Chapter one, indicates that it is safe to argue

[15] *LW* 31:329-379. The title of this treatise is also known as "Concerning Christian Freedom", "On Christian Liberty", etc. in various translations.

[16] Mattes, "Beyond the Impasse," 272.

that, **the essence of preaching paraenesis is none other than that of preaching Christian freedom on the grounds of the gospel**. What it means is that we may be able to overcome the "impasse" if we focus on preaching the gospel freedom, elucidated in this *treatise* of Luther!

The *treatise* "*The Freedom of a Christian*", therefore, will serve as our primary source to establish a theological basis for preaching. The scope of this study is thus narrowed down into a focus on the preaching of the gospel freedom in Christ rather than the preaching of a diverse spectrum of paraeneses of different characteristics. This re-established emphasis simplifies the study and alleviates many uncertainties, concerns and constraints belonging to the controversies and difficulties around the debates over the third use of the law; that is, the "impasse" of preaching applications.

We will verify the validity of the approach by examining samples of sermons where paraeneses are actually preached. The major source of samples is taken from the New Testament Epistle of Paul to the Philippians. A few examples of Luther's own writings are also examined for comparison. The Epistle to the Philippians is chosen because it is highly "sermonic"; that is, it is in the proper form, style and length of an actual complete sermon, instead of a collection of sermons and other documents of communication like 1 Corinthians, or mostly doctrinal discourses like Romans. Also, it is full of paraeneses from the very beginning to the end. Studying Philippians avails us a glimpse into the concrete shape of the gospel freedom amid a host of exhortations and ethical directives, and equips us with more confidence in preaching this unique freedom in Christ, wherever practical life applications of law and gospel are desired.

Chapter One　The Uninvited Impasse of the Law-Gospel Preaching

Section One　Law and Gospel—The Necessary Distinction

Sound biblical preaching is the all-time *sine qua non* of God's people.　The faith of the Church rests upon it (Rom.10:17).　A deficiency of it results in a grave spiritual famine which cannot be alleviated by any other means (Amos 8:11-12). The Apostle Paul charges Timothy to "*preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching*" (2 Tim. 4:2).　Thus an encouragement with exhortation, advice and admonishment, that is, an actual paraenesis, for preachers of the Word is the general objective of this study. Specifically, it is intended to help preachers who employ Martin Luther's law-gospel preaching paradigm to be able to "*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*" confidently without apologizing, and without compromising the impacts of the law-gospel preached.

What is perplexing for many thoughtful preachers is that they have endeavored diligently to preach from the Scripture, yet the spiritual famine remains in their congregations.　The sentiment can be demonstrated in a sample complaint from a church member:

> *"My Christian life, truly begun by grace, was now being 'perfected' on the treadmill of the Law. ... I was told [by my pastors] to yield more, pray more, care about unbelievers more, read the Bible more, get involved with the church more, love my wife and kids more. . . .　my Christian life had come to center around* ***my*** *life,* ***my*** *obedience,* ***my*** *yielding,* ***my*** *Bible verse memorization,* ***my*** *prayers,* ***my*** *zeal,* ***my*** *witnessing, and* ***my*** *sermon application. I had advanced beyond the need to hear the cross preached to me anymore. Of course, we all knew that Je-*

*sus had died for our sins, and none of us would ever argue that we were trying to 'merit' salvation. But something had changed. God was a Father all right, but a painfully demanding one. I was supposed to show that **I** had cleaned up **my** life and was at least grateful for all the gifts that had been bestowed*".[17]

Preachers may feel bewildered because these are good things, even biblical standards, which they preach & entreat for obedience. Yet reactions to such preaching are often frustrations and similar negative sentiments among their congregants. The preachers' sincere attempt to follow the biblical mandate of preaching the Word does not seem to accomplish expected life-changing effects in their congregants.

The reality is that what is preached from the pulpit is actually not the gospel, the "true message" of the text; even though the preacher has tried his best to deliver what he believes to be the meaning therein. Many preachers miss the point that **the message of a text depends not only on the apparent literal meaning, but also on its purpose**: that is, why it is placed there in that particular context in the Bible; in other words, whether it functions as law or gospel.

Here Martin Luther's insight of the distinction between law and gospel is highly significant. He proposed the distinction between "*commandments and promises*" as early as 1520[18] in his *treatise* "*The Freedom of a Christian*", in answering challenges against justification by faith alone. He began with a high view of faith that would have startled his contemporary theologians:

*Many people view Christian faith as something easy, and quite a few people even count it as if it were related to the **virtues**. They do this because they have not judged faith in light of any experience, nor have they ever tasted its great*

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[17] Craig A. Parton, *The Defense Never Rests: A Lawyer's Quest for the Gospel* (St.Louis: Concordia, 2003), 18. Quoted in Mark A. Seifrid, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: An Introduction to the Distinction between Law and Gospel", *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 56–68. Emphases mine.

[18] Actually two year earlier, Luther had already contrasted the "law" with "grace" in the 1518 Heidelberg Disputation, *LW* 31:56. Even earlier, he made a contrast between the "spirit" and "letter" in his early (1512-1513) Lectures on the Psalms, *LW* 10:4, 11:129-30, etc. But the essence of the distinction is fully explicated here for the first time in *The Freedom of a Christian*.

power.[19]

The medieval church saw faith as a chief "virtue" to be formed by works of love. Luther contends that faith is far superior to any "virtues" attainable by our own works. It is the trusting relationship with God that can only be "tasted" by a believer in the trials and struggles of life: "*But one who has had even a small taste of faith can never write, speak, reflect, or hear enough about it*".[20] That is, no work of our own can attain this precious faith which alone justifies.

Luther was, of course, anticipating objections that, if faith alone justifies without works, why "*so many works, ceremonies, and laws are prescribed in the Scriptures?"*[21]

It was such objections that prompted him to propose the crucial distinction: "*Here we must point out that the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises."*[22] That is, law and gospel.

The basic idea is that God's message comes to us chiefly in two distinctive manners through His Holy Scripture—law and gospel. Each has its distinctive function and purpose. The law reveals God's righteous standards and tells us **what we ought to do** as His image bearers. Yet as fallen sinners we are never able to perfectly conform to His standards by our own works. As a result, these Scriptures show our inadequacy, convict us of sin and condemn us as sinners (Rom. 3:20). This is the major function of "law".[23] Here Luther uses the term "commandments" for law:

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[19] Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther*, translated by Timothy Wengert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016) Kindle location 454 and Note #54 therein. Boldface emphasis mine.

[20] *Ibid*. and note #55 therein.

[21] *LW* 31:348.

[22] *Ibid*.

[23] To be exact, the focus here is on the major function, or use, of the law, known to Lutherans as its "second use". There are three functions of the law, according to Lutheran Confession in *The Book*

> *. . . the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability . . .*[24]

Meanwhile, God uses the other part of the Scripture, the gospel, to comfort us and call us to Himself in faith. It is termed "promises" in this 1520 *treatise*:

> *Here the second part of Scripture comes to our aid, namely, the promises of God which declare the glory of God, saying, '. . . come, believe in Christ in whom grace, righteousness, peace, liberty, and all things are promised you . . .' That which is impossible for you to accomplish by trying to fulfill all the works of the law . . .you will accomplish quickly and easily through faith . . .*[25]

This is the function of the "gospel". It declares **what God has done for us**, through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ; and what greater things He will do still at the end when Christ comes again. It offers comfort, promises and hope to distressed, helpless sinners, so they might have faith to turn to Christ for forgiveness and liberation from sin.

This "law-gospel" distinction[26] is one of the major distinctives of the Reformation. It guides preachers of the Word to discern the functions and purposes of the various parts of the text they are preaching from, and enables them to "rightly handle the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Law and gospel are two distinct "words",[27] or types of messages, in the Bible,

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of Concord FC Ep VI. 1, as will be explained in the following discussions.

[24] *LW* 31:348.

[25] *LW* 31:348.

[26] Luther later preferred the "law-gospel" usage and employed this idea of distinction all the time; e.g., it is all over his 1535 Galatians Commentary. *LW* 26 and 27. But the doctrinal concept is completely identifiable with the "commandments-promises" language here.

[27] This terminology is taken from Luther's sermon of The Third Sunday in Advent in *Through the Year with Martin Luther—a Selection of Sermons Celebrating the Feasts and Seasons of the Christian Year* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007).

each serves its distinct purpose. Making the right distinction is crucial in doing theology. In Luther's own words from his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535),

> *Therefore whoever knows well how to distinguish the Gospel from the Law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian.*[28]

In his later Table Talks (1542), he recalled his own journey into the proper distinction as a "breakthrough",

> *I learned to distinguish between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of the gospel. I lacked nothing before this except that I made no distinction between the law and the gospel. I regarded both as the same thing and held that there was no difference between Christ and Moses except the times in which they lived and their degrees of perfection. But when I discovered the proper distinction, namely, that the law is one thing and the gospel is another I broke through.*[29]

Properly distinguishing law and gospel is vital for understanding the Scripture. Misreading the purpose and function of a certain scriptural passage results in misuse of the text and thus, distorted message. Such mistakes happen when the distinction between law and gospel is ignored, when law and gospel are mixed, confused or when the one is taken to serve the purpose of the other; despite the preacher's sincere intention to hold fast to the apparent literal meaning of the text. This is often found in, e.g., taking a text of law and demanding exact conformity as the sermon's ultimate goal. The misrepresented message leads to the frustrations such as those quoted in the sample at the beginning of this chapter.

The advantage of the law-gospel distinction is not limited to hermeneutical processes. It can help Christians to possess a holistic biblical perspective in understanding any type of messages, and exercise prudent discernment on all ideas. The usefulness of making the distinction can be readily demonstrated in telling the inade-

[28] *LW* 26:115.

[29] *LW* 54:442.

quacy of a popular practice of preachers quoting the famous German poem, which accuses the church's cowardice during the Nazi regime, for mobilizing the audience:

> *First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Communist.*
>
> *Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Trade Unionist.*
>
> *Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew.*
>
> *Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.*[30]

The poem carries a powerful message, often appreciated and exploited by advocates of, say, various social movements. It is a self-sufficient idea for a message that is effective in motivating people to get involved. And it is often employed that way even in church pulpits. However, upon a closer inspection under the law-gospel distinction, it is immediately clear that the quoted poem, standing alone by itself, is purely law all over without gospel at all. People are only motivated by shame, guilt, worries and threats—all being functions of the law. Effective as it can be, it alone does not lead people to God's grace. On the contrary, it makes those who embrace its message more self-conscious and self-centered; and leads them away from the cross of Christ and the self-denial of true discipleship. Ultimately it results in performance-oriented harsh legalism and hypocrisy.

Yet the above comments are not at all negative criticisms to deny this well-known poem of its significant worth to humanity. This poem expresses the biblical mandate of caring for the weak and persecuted. It is one of the two "greatest" of all the commandments—to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:39). What

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[30] Attributed to Martin Niemöller (1892–1984), a German nationalist-turned Lutheran pastor and then a pacifist, through the decade of ordeals in the WWII. Niemöller's life story is a complex reflection of his time and cannot be simplified into a heroic realization of conscience. The quotation is likely out of context too. See Matthew D Hockenos, *Then They Came for Me: Martin Niemöller, the Pastor Who Defied the Nazis* (New York: Basic Books 2018).

must be pointed out is that the law, as much as it is pure and right in and of itself, cannot alone transform the sinful nature of a sinner's life. Ultimately, we need the gospel. This poem, powerful as it is, cannot stand by itself alone. The promise of God's grace in Christ must be proclaimed together with it.

Applying the law-gospel paradigm in cases like this readily reveals the fact that a message or idea can be persuasive and practically effective; yet far from salvific and redemptive. Such messages may work well temporarily in achieving human feats, yet they can never be truly edifying in people's lives in the long run.

Now, it is straightforward to see how crucial this law-gospel paradigm is for preaching. In a sound homiletical process, a preacher must keep in mind always that, he is to preach the law in the most unyielding, uncompromising way so that sinners might become convicted in their conscience of their sinfulness, of the inadequacy of their good works, their inability to make up for their sins,[31] and thus humbled into contrition. And when the purpose of law is thus served; he is to present the gospel of God's grace in the sweetest and most comforting manner, with clear promises and firm assurance in the free, redemptive merit of Christ, so that the listeners might be revived in hope, awakened and strengthened in faith, turn to God and receive the grace that liberates them from the bondage of a guilty conscience.

Such a law-gospel pattern of preaching helps preachers avoid various common errors such as moralism, legalism when the gospel is watered down; or on the other extreme of down playing the law, the "cheap grace" of antinomianism. The paradigm enables preachers to keep the focus of their proclamation on God's gracious, liberating gospel in Christ. It is crucial, therefore, for preachers to possess a solid

[31] The Lutheran Confession stresses that "For the Law always accuses and terrifies consciences", Ap IV; also, "But the Law always accuses us, always shows that God is angry", Ap III and "For the Law will always accuse us, because we never satisfy God's Law", Ap VII… etc.

grasp of this concept, and have a good command of employing this law-gospel homiletical device.

Section Two The Big Issue—Paraenesis

1. *Rigid Exercise of the Paradigm*

However, we may "*fall off the other side*" of the saddle[32] while trying to stick rigidly to this "necessary distinction".

For example, an obvious problem is predictable, stereotyped sermons.[33] Because whatever topics or texts the preacher chooses, he/she will, predictably, follow the convicting-comforting, sin-grace or law-gospel order of sermon construction. The conclusion, i.e., the gospel is the only way out for all problems of sin, is out in the open even before the sermon starts. It is difficult to employ creative "plots" to strike home the impact of the message, and the sermon risks becoming powerless and boring. It seems quite a challenge for preachers to be innovative while faithfully working within this paradigm. And the listeners would soon get used to it, become numb to the law, and take the gospel for granted.

This problem, though, is not intrinsically insoluble. It can be overcome by the realization that, the law-gospel preaching paradigm is not a rigid formula or inflexible structure of sermon construction. It is more of a fundamental understanding and conviction about the different functions and purposes of various parts of God's Word. There can be ample room for innovative plots as long as the functions and purposes of

[32] "The world is like a drunken peasant. If you lift him into the saddle on one side, he will fall off again on the other side. One can't help him, no matter how one tries. He wants to be the devil's." (Table Talks 630, 1533. *LW* 54:111).

[33] M. Hopson Boutot, "How Did Luther Preach? A Plea for Gospel-Dominated Preaching," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81 no.1 (2017): 96.

every portion of the text are rightly grasped.

A ready example is Paul's Mars Hill sermon at Athens (Acts 17:22-31). Being sensitive to the gentiles' lack of readiness to hear God's Commandments which are a world of difference from their lifestyles, Paul actually starts with the gospel (what God has done, is doing and promises to do for us) in verses 22-28:

> *. . . "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for*
>
> *"In him we live and move and have our being";*
> *as even some of your own poets have said,*
> *"For we are indeed his offspring."*

The law (you are idolaters and ignorant of God, in need of repentance) does not begin until verses 29-30:

> *Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent…*

Yet with the concluding gospel (resurrection of Christ and faith/assurance for all who have ears) of verse 31, it is definitely an out-and-out law-gospel sermon, as the purposes and functions of both law and gospel are fulfilled effectively:

> *. . . because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.*

This seemingly arbitrary sermon structure demonstrates that with a sound theol-

ogy, a sensitive heart for the listeners' felt needs vs. real needs, the preacher can be highly flexible in constructing the sermon. The law-gospel mindset can underlie many forms and constructions of sermons, accommodating the freedom of all kinds of creativity.

2. *Paraenesis in the Law-Gospel Paradigm*

What concerns us more in this study is another, far more serious problem: what can the preacher do with "paraenesis"? That is, how can the preacher encourage, comfort, exhort, admonish, instruct and rebuke, when the gospel is predestined to be the final word of every sermon? Where can he place life applications or admonitions for good works… etc.? The preacher's task is to preach both law and gospel to the fullest; that is, by sternly accusing and convicting the conscience of sin with the law, and graciously promising forgiveness and liberation/salvation with the gospel. When that is done, the sermon would have reached its culmination, where grace reigns preeminently. It would be the natural point to end the sermon. There seems to be very little room left for practical instruction, encouragement for action and application in Christian life, not to mention addressing more involved issues such as good works, ethics and social justice; as any such emphases would not only take the focus away from the gospel and thus soften its impact on the listeners; but could also suggest, though implicitly to a certain extent, a reversion back to the works of the law and our own merits.

"Paraenesis", as practical life applications of the message preached, should be placed after the discourse which is made up of the law-gospel dialectics. Yet that could be to the sermon like an added encumbrance after the climax of the story, which spoils the plot! More seriously, its very purpose is to comfort, encourage, entreat and reprimand the listeners to "**do**" something. By this very feature, it is "law" by definition, despite its purposes and functions are discreetly different from the law in

the law-gospel paradigm. Could it thus undermine the liberating power of the gospel? Could it divert the focus of the listeners from the cross of Christ back towards human endeavors? Could it distract their reliance away from purely on Christ's redemptive merit towards their own works of merit? These concerns are real and highly probable risks. Now, what can a preacher do with paraenesis in the law-gospel paradigm of preaching, which insists the sermon to culminate in the gospel? This difficulty has actually been the cause for many errors and controversies, leading to negative criticisms of the law-gospel paradigm, often blaming Luther for creating various kinds of ethical and moral difficulties.

3. *Antinomianism*

Roman Catholic scholars fault Luther for the chaos, vice and immorality in society since the Reformation.[34] These are in fact the consequences of Antinomianism, an error Luther vehemently opposed. He shows no favor for the antinomians' overkill against the legalistic errors of the church: "*The world is like a drunken peasant. If one helps him into the saddle on one side, he will fall off on the other side*."[35]

Antinomians, literally meaning people without the law, contend that the law has no business in a Christian's life. Therefore antinomian preachers can simply do away with paraenesis altogether in preaching. Yet paraenesis is an integral part of the Bible. It not only dominates the messages of Moses and the Prophets in the Old Testament, it also, and more conspicuously, makes up a substantial portion in the New Testament. It appears in every Epistle. It also appears in the teaching/preaching of Jesus and the Apostles often, in the Gospels and Acts. Avoiding it would inevitably ignore those substantial portions of the Scriptures, compromise the integrity of the

[34] George Forell, *Faith Active in Love* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000), 16.

[35] *LW* 54:111. The comment appears in Luther's *Table Talk* in 1533, even before Luther got involved personally in the disputations against Agricola.

Word of God, and in the end water down the impact of the gospel message preached in the listeners' lives. One Antinomian during Luther's time in particular, Johannes Agricola, was a former follower and colleague of Luther. Agricola's antinomian influence was so widespread that it drove Luther to compose several disputations against the Antinomians in the late 1530's,[36] which are of great value for us today in clarifying the controversies.[37]

4. *Controversy about the Third Use of the Law*

As a result, Articles V and VI of the Formula of Concord (1577) were formulated in order to take a firm confessional stand against the Antinomians. There, in response to the Antinomians' wide-spread influences, the term "the third use of the law" was coined to assert the role of law in the life of the regenerate.[38] It is called the "third use" of the law, to distinguish its function from that of the first (civil) use of the law for curbing the unruly and maintaining social orders, and the second (theological) use for exposing sin and convicting the conscience of guilt.[39] It is specifically for

[36] See *LW* 47:101, the Introduction to *Against the Antinomians* (1539). This is the first disputation translated into English. It is generally acknowledged that it was Luther who coined the term "antinomianism".

[37] It is said that "The benefit which resulted from the Antinomian controversies to the Lutheran Church was a greater exactness in distinguishing between the law and the Gospel, justification and sanctification, and Luther's theses for his six Antinomian disputations, 258 in all, should be carefully and repeatedly studied by every theologian." See: Augustus Lawrence Graebner, "Antinomianism." *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (New York: Scribner, 1899), 18. [Online], Available: https://archive.org/stream/lutherd00jaco/lutherd00jaco_djvu.txt (accessed Jan.04, 2019).

[38] "The confessional basis for the third use of the law seems to hinge on giving a direct answer to the anxiety arising from antinomianism: Do Christians still need the law?" Mark C. Mattes: "Beyond the Impasse: Re-examining the Third Use of the Law," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 69 (2005): 275.

[39] FC Ep VI. 1 "*Since the Law was given to men for three reasons: first, that thereby outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient men [and that wild and intractable men might be restrained, as though by certain bars]; secondly, that men thereby may be led to the knowledge of their sins; thirdly, that after they are regenerate and [much of] the flesh notwithstanding cleaves to them, they might on this account have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life . . .*".

guidance and instruction, leading to a "new obedience"[40] in the life of the regenerate which is entirely different from the legalistic works of the law. "The third use of the law" is now firmly incorporated in the Lutheran Confessions.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, the controversies have persisted ever since the early Antinomians, with the heat of debates fluctuating over the centuries. Many, even within Lutheran circles, repeat the errors of falling off either side of the horse.[41] On the one hand, in opposing antinomianism, stubborn tendencies towards works of the law, stealing the name of the third use of the law, keep on creeping back into theological thoughts of the times, producing sermons with ethical instructions which are tainted with self-reliant piety or, worse, Christ-less moralistic pep talks. On the other hand, reincarnated antinomians, hiding under the excuses that the third use of the law could be misused, are persuading preachers to sterilize even biblical paraeneses into mere repetitions of the slogan "You can't, but Jesus did it for you."[42] The firm confessional emphasis on the third use of the law does not sweep these errors, intentional or unintentional, away fully from the path of preaching law and gospel.

5. *The "Radical Lutheranism"*

Putting aside those errors of extremes, there are still more robust Lutheran theologians who intend to abide by the Confessions, but just do not feel at home with the

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[40] AC IV.

[41] There are heated debates on many fronts within the Lutheran circles especially during the past half century. For the controversies in recent American Lutheran history, see, for example, a summary in Scott R. Murray: *Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002. More up-to-date, elaborated collection of discussions and debates can be found in Albert B. Colver III, James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless, eds., *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

[42] M. Hopson Boutot, "How Did Luther Preach? A Plea for Gospel-Dominated Preaching," Concordia Theological Quarterly 81 no.1 (2017): 95-117.

idea of more law "after" the gospel as God's last Word to His people. As Christians, some would contend, we are free and no longer living under the law (Gal. 5:18). Christ is the *end* of the law (Rom. 10:4). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1). Christians live according to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:5, Gal. 5:25), not the Law (Gal. 5:23-24), thus there is no need for the law in preaching to the regenerate—regardless of which "use" of it.[43] Some prefer "evangelical imperative" (or the gospel imperative)[44] to "the third use of the law".[45] There are also arguments that the "third use" is not necessary because its functions can be covered by the first and second uses already.[46] After all, they maintain, Christian life and good works are motivated by the gospel, not by the law.

These positions, seemingly not in full conformity to the official Lutheran Confessions of the third use of the law, are nevertheless shared by many distinguished Lutheran scholars. The names include Werner Elert of last century, the late Gerhard O. Forde, and contemporary leading scholars like Oswald Bayer and William Lazareth. These prominent scholars have distinctive theological characteristics which are colorfully diverse, but all of them down-play or avoid the third use of the law.[47] With their "radical" positions on the primacy of the gospel, they are often identified as

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[43] This argument, if pushed to the extreme, would result in consequences which critics call the "gospel reductionism", see, for example, Scott R. Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 103-107.

[44] Paul Althaus, *The Divine Command: A New Perspective on Law and Gospel*, trans. F. Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 1-2.

[45] Whether that is just an alternative in terminology or a fundamentally different idea is up to debate too.

[46] Forde, for example, insists that the "third use of the law" is actually just a return to the first use under a new guise. Gerhard Forde, *Where God Meets Man* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 1972), 13.

[47] See, for example, Steven Paulson, "The Law-Gospel Distinction in Lutheran Theology and Ministry," in Jonathan Linebraugh, ed., *God's Two Words: Law and Gospel in the Lutheran and Reformed Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 103-128.

the "Radical Lutheranism".[48] Some of them propose that the new obedience in the Confession should be considered "the second use of the gospel" rather than the third use of the Law.[49]

6. *Confessional Insistence on the Third Use*

Even among those holding fast to the confessional stand of the *Book of Concord*, some are trying to put emphasis more on the "new obedience"[50] and stay away from the controversies about the third use of the law when possible.

Whether Martin Luther himself ever advocated a third use of the law is also hotly debated. It is argued that Luther never employed the term "third use"; while the only substantiated manuscript of Luther mentioning the term "*tertius usus legis*", in the Weimar Edition, is considered a forgery.[51] But some newer studies, taking into consideration historical context data not included by the earlier researchers, claim that although Luther might fall short of using the very term, the essential concept that the law serves as positive instructions in Christian life is never absent in his teaching. The Large and Small Catechisms are examples how Luther treats the law, within the law-gospel paradigm, in the life of a believer.[52] Yet even within the positive propo-

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[48] The word "radical" is favored by Forde, see, e.g., Gerhard O. Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987): 1-16; also *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) and *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017). The idea of being "radical" actually means back to the "root" of Lutheranism.

[49] William H. Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 198ff.

[50] AC VI; FC Ep III. 21; etc.

[51] Werner Elert, "Eine theologische Fälschung zur Lehre vom tertius usus legis," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 1* (1948): 168– 70; from Michael S. Whiting, *Luther in English: The Influence of His Theology of Law and Gospel on Early English Evangelicals (1525-35)* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 30 and footnotes therein. But other scholars may not think Elert has proved the manuscript forged. Referring to Elert's opinion, Wagner says: "Elert noted the passage, did not question its authenticity, and dismissed it as irrelevant". See Walter H. Wagner "Luther and the Positive Use of the Law," *Journal of Religious History* 11-1 (2007), 53, footnote 11.

[52] E.g., Wagner "Luther and the Positive Use of the Law," *Journal of Religious History* 11-1 (2007), 45-63. Also see Edward A. Engelbrecht, "Luther's Threefold Use of the Law," *Concordia*

nents of the law's third use, there are concerns that teaching good works might inadvertently reinstate legalism and moralism, thus dilute the precious essence and effects of the gospel. Wagner, for example, affirms that Luther does have a positive attitude towards the third use of the law in Christian life, yet with a strong caveat that this is a "non-Calvinist" third use.[53]

Lastly, there are also vehement, uncompromising advocates for a literal Confessional stand concerning the third use for Lutherans. They insist that the use of the term "the third use of the law" is literally non-negotiable. Its confessional, doctrinal position is the only orthodox position to be upheld,[54] and resent any suggestion of reservation. To them, the "Radical Lutherans" like Forde are making a serious error of "Gospel Reductionism", a dressed-up form of antinomianism.[55] Still, these die-hard proponents of the third use have yet to give satisfactory answers to the concerns whether the law, or the gospel, is the "last word" of God to His people; and how do they distinctly differ from the Reformed law-gospel-law emphasis.

Theological Quarterly 75 (2011): 135-150. For more extensive discussions on this issue, see Engelbrecht's book, *Friends of the Law: Luther's Use of the Law for the Christian Life* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing: 2011).

[53] Wagner, "Luther and the Positive Use of the Law". The main difference between Lutheran Confessions and Calvinism on the uses of the law is not that much in their respective descriptions or definitions, but in their emphases. While Luther sees the second, theological use to be the chief use of the law and it is for **both** unbelievers and believers, Calvinists consider the third, normative use for the regenerate to be the main purpose of the law. This difference is a manifestation of the more fundamental difference in **anthropology**, illustrated by the Lutheran doctrine of the "*simul"*—that according to Luther, a believer is simultaneously righteous and a sinner. The topic has a major bearing on the fundamental direction of this study, and will be discussed extensively with relevant issues in chapters three to six.

[54] E.g., Jordan Cooper, *Lex Aeterna: A Defense of the Orthodox Lutheran Doctrine of God's Law and Critique of Gerhard Forde* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

[55] Jordan Cooper, *Hands of Faith: A Historical and Theological Study of the Two Kinds of Righteousness in Lutheran Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 4ff.

Section Three The "Impasse" of Preaching Paraenesis

1. *The Challenge of Preaching Paraenesis*

It is obvious that there won't be any simple solutions to these controversies. While scholars and theologians are debating over the validity of the third use, pastors and preachers are struggling too. They are unsure how to provide the flocks in their care with pure spiritual food with regards to paraenesis. The paradigm of distinguishing law and gospel has unwittingly created a "homiletical **impasse,**"[56] in that preachers are not sure how they should preach applications and good works in Christian living. Since scholars cannot unequivocally decide how Lutherans should settle the doctrinal issues, it is up to each individual preacher to go through the ordeals of choosing where to take a stand. What can a preacher do?

The details of doctrinal/theological debates are way too involved and complicated, and the spectrum of opinions too wide and diverse, for an average pastor/preacher to grasp. There are hermeneutical/philosophical technicalities too demanding beyond their general seminary training for ministering in parish congregations. The challenge is formidable. On the one hand, preaching paraenesis is not only exemplified in the New Testament Epistles, it is explicitly mandated in them[57]. Paul's charge to "*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*" (2 Tim. 4:2) is not only for Timothy but for every Christian called to preach the Word faithfully, no matter if he holds a career office of preaching or not. And paraenesis is undoubtedly essential for pastoral ministry as real-life applications of the doctrines preached. Without paraenesis, the preaching could deteriorate into lectures of biblical and theological facts. But on the other hand, preachers must bear in mind that the "mother tongue" we fallen hu-

[56] See footnote 1, p.1.

[57] See, for example, Rom.15:3, Col.3:16, 1Thess.4:28, 1Tim.4:6, 5:17-19, and 2Tim.3:16, 4:2ff.

man beings are accustomed to is the law, not gospel; it is work-merits, not grace. There is always the danger that any attempt of preaching paraenesis could be taken the wrong way and relapse back to the works of the law. This risk is not limited to the listeners. The preacher himself might first fall victim to this innate tendency unwittingly.

The preacher is thus under tremendous pressures and multiple constraints from preaching paraenesis freely, no matter where he/she stands in the debate. The law-gospel paradigm, which is supposed to free preachers from various pitfalls and errors, has inadvertently worked against the freedom in preaching the Word confidently. The "impasse" seems insoluble. Preachers of the Word, barely freed by the law-gospel paradigm from errors of moralism, legalism or antinomianism, are robbed of the hard-earned freedom and taken under another "captivity"[58] by that very device which is meant to liberate them. Could it mean that the law-gospel hermeneutical device is intrinsically flawed?[59]

2. *Martin Luther's "Secret" of Preaching Paraenesis*

Martin Luther, however, sees no impasse. While Luther himself is a passionate advocate of distinguishing law and gospel, he does not hesitate to instruct and admonish, even harshly rebuke Christians with specific practical directives in life. "Paraenesis" is offered liberally and often even assuming the major role in his sermons and pastoral counsels. However, at the same time these sermons/counsels are still brimming over with the hope and freedom of the gospel. This is not limited to some special cases. It is a conspicuous feature of Luther, displayed in his numerous

[58] Alluding to Martin Luther's another famous treatise in 1520, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church". *LW* 36:57-81.

[59] That is often the claim of some Reformed preachers. E.g., Rich Lusk, "Why the law/gospel paradigm is flawed," *Theologia*, [Online], Available: http://hornes.org/theologia/rich-lusk/why-the-law-gospel-paradigm-is-flawed (accessed Jun.10, 2020).

sermons, table talks and other writings.

This observation suggests that there must be something underlying Luther's confidence in preaching paraenesis. What is his secret to such freedom of preaching? Does he have a unique "theology" of preaching? If we can get hold of that "something", it could serve, not only as inspiration, but also as tangible guiding principles for today's preachers to face the apparent "impasse" in the law-gospel preaching paradigm.

Thus it is the aim of the following study to discover Luther's "secret" in preaching paraenesis. The consideration is to steer away, as much as possible, from unsettled controversies and difficult technicalities, to put together the findings into uncomplicated working principles with clear concepts and unambiguous guidelines; and to offer a simpler theological basis of focused emphases, with practical helps for preachers today. The goal is to free them from the swamps of endless theoretical and philosophical debates; in other words, to free them from the aforesaid impasse, and enable them to preach paraenesis confidently with appropriate freedom, while still firmly upholding the advantages of the law-gospel paradigm.

3. *Paraenesis and Preaching "Christian Freedom"*

The natural question to ask first is, therefore, "What elements in Luther's doctrinal distinctives significantly contribute to his paraenesis preaching?" More specifically, can we discover the general theological conviction and impetus that enables Luther to preach paraenesis so freely? This is a logical question to be addressed first, as the groundwork is theology, not techniques or methods. When we get the theology right, good preaching will follow eventually; not vice versa.

If we have to address the question by starting from scratch, it would be too formidable a task to even think about. Luther's doctrinal works are myriads; most of them crucial to his theology about preaching. For example, his deep conviction of

the doctrine of "justification by faith alone" obviously helps his preaching steer clear of synergistic moralism apart from God's saving grace. In this sense, almost all doctrinal distinctives of Luther are relevant. They would include, in addition to the law-gospel distinction, justification by faith, the "*Simul*"—*Simul*taneously righteous and a sinner; salvation as being *extra nos* (outside ourselves); union with Christ; two kinds of righteousness; grace and good works; believers' vocation and the priesthood of all believers… etc.; and the list goes on.

The neat fact we have at hand is that we don't have to do all the research and generalization ourselves. As indicated in the Introduction, Luther has done it for us in his famous treatise "*The Freedom of a Christian*". It was written in 1520, at the time he was about to be excommunicated by the Pope Leo X. Expecting to meet his doom anytime as a declared heretic, Luther probably thought that this could be his final words to the Pope, the Church and the world.[60] He obviously made an all-out effort to explain and proclaim the gospel truths in this "little tract",[61] making it a theologically rich and comprehensive treatise. It is loaded with important doctrinal topics which Luther would further advance in the following decades as the Reformation grew into a worldwide historic movement.

Luther raised these doctrinal issues because they are all pertinent to his main concern—the Christian freedom on the grounds of the gospel. In so doing, he has demonstrated that this "gospel freedom" is the underlying impetus for all these im-

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[60] Timothy Wengert, "The Final Word: Martin Luther's Freedom of a Christian for Today's Church"— Dr. Timothy Wengert's final public lecture at The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia Tuesday, on November 19, 2013 [Online], Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXl8CJi9hDI (accessed on Fall 2017). Also Wengert, "Liberated by God's Gracious Word," [Online], Available: https://www.lutheranworld.org/blog/liberated-gods-gracious-word (accessed on Mar. 10, 2018).

[61] Luther claims that "it contains a summary of the whole Christian life," Introduction to the Tract, in "Luther's Epistle to Leo X, Supreme Pontiff," Timothy Wengert, *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2016), Kindle Edition location 444.

portant doctrines. At the same time, these doctrines are also highly relevant to biblical paraenesis. Actually they are all foundational truths necessary for a solid, effective paraenesis!

Summing up the whole treatise are two major propositions:

1. *The Christian individual is a completely free lord of all, subject to none.*
2. *The Christian individual is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all.*[62]

These two propositions seem to be contradictory, but Luther demonstrates that they are completely compatible and both being essential consequences of the Christian freedom grounded on the gospel.

It is not hard to see that, the first proposition is the antidote to legalism, moralism and work-righteousness; while the second, to antinomianism. These common errors are on the two opposing extremes in mistreating issues with biblical paraeneses, and therefore the root causes of our preaching impasse. Yet these are exactly what Luther is dealing with in *The Freedom of a Christian*. The two propositions sound paradoxical: how can one be the lord of all, at the same time servant to all? Yet that is the beauty and mystery of the gospel—we, in Christ, are liberated from all dominating powers by grace through faith, that we are enabled to love, to do good works for and to serve our neighbor voluntarily. As Luther starts his arguments right after these two propositions:

> *Although these topics appear to contradict one another, nevertheless, if they can be found to be in agreement, they will serve our purposes beautifully. For both are from the Apostle Paul, when he says in 1 Cor. 9[:19], "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all" . . .* [63]

Now, isn't that paradox/contradiction exactly our "impasse" in preaching parae-

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[62] *LW* 31:344. Translation taken from Timothy Wengert, *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2016).

[63] Timothy Wengert, *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther,* Kindle Locations 473-475. After the 1 Corinthian 9:19 citation, Luther also cites and elaborates on Rom. 13:8 about "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another". This manner of being freed through faith to become a servant in love freely, or in Luther's rendering of Galatians 5:6, "faith . . . active through love" (LW 31:365), is the core message of the gospel of the cross, as we will discuss extensively later.

nesis, as we already indicated in the Introduction? This correlation indicates the possibility of drastically reducing the complexity of our task in building groundwork for preaching. It is safe to argue that, the essence of preaching paraenesis is none other than preaching Christian freedom empowered by the gospel. There is a tangible hope to overcome the homiletical impasse — by just focusing on preaching Christian freedom, on the grounds of the gospel, wherever paraenesis is desired. And that will be our approach.

Chapter Two
Which is God's Last Word?

The "impasse" mentioned in the precious chapter is basically a question of the last word. If the law—what God demands us to do—is the last word, does it mean that what **we do** is of decisive consequence in our salvation, and thus aligns us with those semi-Pelagians? If not, and the gospel—what God has done/will do for us—is the last word, why do we have to preach an additional law of **our doing** after it? And if there is a right reason for it, how do we do it rightly? For preachers of the Word with law-gospel distinction in mind, one fundamental issue must be settled up-front: which is God's last word to His people, and thus the ultimate purpose of a sermon? Is it law, or gospel?

Section One Other Approaches to the Law-Gospel Paradigm

This is not a trivial question. The law-gospel paradigm as a homiletical device, culminating in the gospel, is not the only pattern accepted and practiced by Protestant preachers.[64] Most theologians in the Reformed tradition after John Calvin have maintained that the law is God's final word. According to their covenantal approach to Scripture, Calvinists emphasize the law/gospel continuum more than the distinction.

[64] See, for example, I. John Hesselink, "Law and Gospel or Gospel and Law? Karl Barth, Martin Luther and John Calvin," in *Deel* 53, (2012): 62-80. For a comprehensive discussion, see also Jonathan Linebaugh, *God's Two Words: Law and Gospel in Lutheran and Reformed Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

They also tend to lean more on the law; specifically, on the law's normative use,[65] as the indispensable instruction to the regenerate for lifestyles and good works. The Westminster Confession of Faith states:

> *Although true believers are not justified or condemned by the law…the law is nevertheless very useful to them…. As a rule of life, it informs them of God's will and of their obligation to obey it…*[66]

It is no doubt that for the Calvinists, the law is the last word of God and the ultimate goal of Christian preaching.[67] As the famous quote from the highly esteemed 19th century Dutch scholar Herman Bavinck goes, " . . . *the gospel is temporary; the law is eternal and precisely that which is restored by the gospel.*"[68]

This concept is clearly displayed in the organization of subjects in the Heidelberg Catechism of the Reformed tradition.[69] The law is mentioned only in a general manner in the beginning (Part I: Misery, Question 4). It is under the last part (Part III: Gratitude, which follows Part II: Deliverance) that the law is elaborated & explicated in much greater details in terms of the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.

Many Puritans follow the same homiletical patterns. As a result, they empha-

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[65] This is the "principal" use of the Law with respect to the elect, according to Calvin. See John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, 2:7:12. [Online], Available: http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Calvin%20Institutes%20of%20Christian%20Religion.pdf.

[66] *The Westminster Confession of Faith in Modern English* (Orlando: The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2010) 19-6, 33. [Online], Available: https://epc.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/1-Who-We-Are/B-About-The-EPC/WCF-ModernEnglish.pdf.

[67] Mark A. Seifrid, "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth :An Introduction to the Distinction between Law and Gospel" *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10/2 (Summer 2006), 60-61.

[68] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* Vol.4 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 455. The term and idea of "eternal law" is actually originated from the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas in his monumental *Summa Theologiae,* II-I, q. 93. [Online], Available: https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_%5b1%5d,_EN.pdf. Reformed thinkers often employ it to stress the fact that laws are rooted in God's divine, eternal characters. But the claim that "*the gospel is temporary*" is of Bavinck and his contemporary New Calvinists.

[69] *The Heidelberg Catechism*. [Online], Available: https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Heidelberg-Catechism-with-Intro.pdf.

size largely on the process of sanctification.[70] This emphasis can be seen in Packer's portrayal of John Owen, the influential Puritan theologian:

> *God's purpose for the Christian during his life on earth is sanctification. So said Calvin; so said Owen; and so says Holy Scripture (1 Thess 4:3; 1 Peter 1:15f). In stressing, as he constantly does, the necessity and cruciality of sanctification, Owen is only echoing the New Testament.*[71]

And the law plays a dominant role in sanctification. It can be seen in typical sermon titles like: "The Law Established by the Gospel".[72]

In a similar vein, Karl Barth, insisting that the gospel is Jesus' fulfillment of the Law, treats it as the pre-requisite to our understanding of the Law. The order of proclamation is thus reversed to gospel-law instead of law-gospel.[73] Barth's position on this matter is clearly reflected in the title of his article, "*Gospel and Law," in Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*. For him, "Gospel and Law are united as the one Word of God, and the content of both is grace."[74] The distinction is thus further minimized.

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[70] The Lutherans hold justification as the chief doctrine, while most Puritans like John Owen cited below, value sanctification far more important.

[71] J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 198.

[72] "*The Law Established by the Gospel*" [Online], Available: https://zh.scribd.com/document/40755664/31-the-Law-Established-by-the-Gospel (Accessed on Oct. 30, 2010).

[73] Stephen Hultgren, "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law: Biblical and Theological Considerations," in Albert B. Collver III, James A. Nestingen and John T. Pless (Editors), *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law and Gospel* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 185-251 (Discussions on Barth's position particularly on pp.200-209); and also Naomichi Masaki, "Luther on Law and Gospel in his Lectures on Galatians 1531/1535," in *The Necessary Distinction*, 135-167.

[74] Karl Barth, " 'Gospel and Law,' in Community, State, and Church: Three Essays," ed. W. Herberg (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1960), 71– 100. Barth's concept about "law" is, however, nuanced differently than Luther's use of the same term in making the distinction. See the following discussions in the next section.

Section Two The General and the Endowed Meanings of the Terms

If taken at their face values, the Reformed and other related views are uncompromisingly at odd with the Lutheran's insistence of law-gospel distinction, which contends that the law prepares sinners for the gospel, clearly indicating that the gospel is the last word of God. Should one of the Reformed or Barthian views be accepted as the correct understanding; the Lutheran law-gospel paradigm would have to fall apart; because paraenesis would be easily identified with the "law restored by the gospel", preaching paraenesis would be a given, an unquestionable natural mandate of the normative use of the law, and there would be no homiletical "impasse". In other words, this very study here would be rendered meaningless.

Yet instead of hastily setting the Reformed position on law and gospel in rigid opposition to that of the Lutherans, we should first discern certain subtleties and clarify the nuanced uses of these terms behind the differences. Biblical and theological glossaries and arguments are not like those in mathematical equations or scientific formulas. They may assume different connotations depending on how they are used in context. Here, even the very key words of "law" and "gospel" can be defined in a narrower sense or broader ones.[75]

Biblically, both the terms "law" (*torah*) in the Old Testament and "gospel" (*euangelion*) in the New Testament may be applied in a generalized sense to mean "the Word"—God's message to us. For example, when the Psalmist says blessed is the man whose delight is in "*the 'law' of the LORD*" (Ps.1:2), it does not mean his delight is not in the gospel; similar usages are found in Ps.19, Ps.119, etc. Or, when

[75] This understanding is shared by scholars in both Lutheran and the Reformed traditions. See, e.g., Michael Allen, *The Law in the Reformed Tradition* in Jonathan A. Linebaugh, ed., *God's Two Words* (Eerdmans, MI 2018), 45-62.

Paul says Christ sent him "*to preach the 'gospel'*" (1 Cor.1:17), he did not mean that he would never preach the law. In these usages, "law" and "gospel" are but synonyms, both point to God's Message to His people as a whole. When Bavinck says "the law is eternal",[76] the emphasis is most likely more on this generalized connotation of "law".[77]

Luther is keenly aware of these types of usages, as he says in his lecture on Ps.19:7: "*For the word 'law' is used for God's Word, as is common and customary in Holy Scripture*".[78] Also in is his treatment of "the law of Christ" in Gal.6:2, he relates it to love, or, the "second kind of righteousness"[79]; and never puts this "law" in antithesis to gospel.

Such broader spectra of understanding are also addressed in the Lutheran Confessions. While clarifying whether gospel or law causes repentance, the Epitome of the Formula of Concord indicates:

> "*. . . the term Gospel is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures . . .* ",[80] "*But if the Law and the Gospel, likewise also Moses himself [as] a teacher of the Law and Christ as a preacher of the Gospel are* ***<u>contrasted</u>*** *with one another. . .* ",[81]

Admittedly, there is still some ambiguity in the connotations of these terms in the Confessions,[82] both words are endowed with restricted meanings, and there is no

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[76] See footnote 68.

[77] Allen, in *God's Two Words*, 47.

[78] *LW* 12:142.

[79] The translation is taken from *Marin Luther's Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (1535) : Lecture Notes Transcribed by Students and Presented in Today's English*, translated by Haroldo Camacho (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Publishing House, 2018), 500. For Luther's doctrine on the "two kinds of righteousness", see later discussion in Section Four, Chapter Five in this study.

[80] FC Ep V. 6.

[81] FC Ep V. 7. Emphasis mine.

[82] Hultgren, in *The Necessary Distinction,* 186 & footnotes 6 & 7.

longer room for generalized connotations. This is the way Luther uses them in the law-gospel paradigm, which will be elaborated in the following discussions.

Compared to Luther, the Reformed theologians treat the law and gospel differently, mainly because their Covenant theology governs the understanding of these concepts. For example, the "law" can be placed in the context of the "covenant of works" or in the "covenant of grace", resulting in different connotations of the same word. In such traditions, the law not only reveals our sinfulness, it also demonstrates God's grace![83] The argument that the law is God's final word is based on the understanding—actually the working definition—that the law is God's perfect and ultimate will towards His covenant people.[84] It is God's original will for His creation, messed up in the fall of Adam, yet remains His eternal will for Christians today, and is being restored in Christ through the gospel.[85] This kind of understanding naturally leads to a conclusion that the gospel is simply the means to achieve that ultimate end of restoration. Therefore it is the law, rather than the gospel, that is eternal.

Such characterization favors an outlook of law and gospel as *more continuous than distinct*, where the Law of Moses and the gospel of Christ are in a typological continuum. The gospel is but the practice and working out of the law in this age of grace, before eternity.[86] Within such a context, this ultimate "law" can be understood as God's eternal promises towards us. It should thus dominate all Christian

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[83] Jonathan Linebaugh, *God's Two Words,* 50-51.

[84] *Ibid*. 55.

[85] Many Reformed thinkers, however, do make the distinctions that the final restored state in eternity is a glorified state of being, superior to the pre-fall state. See, for example, *Thomas Boston, Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace, 1964). A synopsis of the ideas can be found here [Online], available: https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/four-fold.html (accessed Jan. 05, 2020).

[86] Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, (Brentwood, TN: Wogelmuth and Hyatt, 1991), Ch. 17.

preaching as the last word. It is small wonder that many Reformed scholars consider the Lutheran law-gospel paradigm "flawed".[87]

But this is neither Luther's focus of concern, nor the context in which the law-gospel paradigm is intended to operate. Luther did not invent the paradigm as a mere hermeneutical device or a philosophical framework for theological thinking. It was for **pastoral concerns** that he proposed it and insisted on the absolute necessity of the distinction, in order **to fight the fatal errors in the church related to justification**; that is, **the errors of confusing faith and works**. His context was not directly relevant to that of the Covenant theology in Calvinism, which was developed much later.[88] "Law" for Luther here (in the law-gospel scheme) is restrictively defined in a manner to be understood as the commands of God that "*show what we ought to do, but do not give the power to do it*".[89] Or, in the idea of the Lutheran Book of Concord,[90] Luther is specifically talking about the "second use" of the law. When dealing with the law-gospel paradigm, Luther is not concerned about the "third use" at all. By the same token, "gospel" is clearly defined, without any ambiguity, as "*the second part of Scripture*", which is "*what Christ has done for us*", offered to us through faith so that we may be able to fulfill the law.[91] While using the same terms law and gospel, yet restrictively defined, Luther and the later Calvinists are not

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[87] See, e.g., Dale Allison, Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[88] Although scattered doctrines about "covenant" can be found since the Church Fathers, a systematic approach to the Scripture through the framework of divine covenants was not fully developed until the 17th century, with the formulation of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646). By then the doctrine of justification through faith had long been well-established among the various Reformation camps.

[89] *LW 31:348*

[90] FC Ep VI. 1.

[91] Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther*, translated by Timothy Wengert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016) Kindle location 570.

talking about exactly the same concepts.

Thus, after all, both the Reformed and Lutheran ways of understanding with respect to law and gospel, put in their respective contexts, could be theologically credible. Each has its own emphases and strengths.

Section Three The Primacy of the Gospel

However, we will still argue in this study that Luther's law-gospel distinction is, nevertheless, an utter necessity for Christian preaching; and that the gospel is, after all, God's last word to His people of faith. We uphold this position even in the face of the difficulties arising from the unwelcomed homiletical "impasse" discussed in Chapter One. Our basic reason is that a last word by the gospel keeps both the preacher and listeners in a God-centered focus; while the law as the last word would easily shift the focus to what **we** do. This insistence is of particular importance today, as most errors in the medieval contexts at Luther's time, which deprived Christians of their gospel freedom and obliged Luther to propose the law-gospel paradigm, still exist in our modern churches.

These persistent errors in the church indicate that human nature after the fall is incorrigibly self-reliant and self-seeking. We habitually attempt to gain the favor of God by our own merits. In other words, we are unconsciously accustomed to and comfortable with the law. We act accordingly even we might profess correct doctrines with our lips and agree intellectually that we should rely on God's grace for salvation. That was how, in the first place, those many erroneous doctrines sneakily found their ways into the Medieval Church over the many centuries preceding the Reformation. Luther lamented in *The Freedom of a Christian*:

> *But in our day we are taught by the doctrine of men to seek nothing but merits, rewards, and the things that are ours; of Christ we have made only a taskmaster*

far harsher than Moses.[92]

Human merit-based religious endeavors spawned a host of deviations away from sound biblical norms, manifested in teachings and practices like monastic spirituality, asceticism, clerical hierarchies,[93] private masses, satisfaction for sins, works of penance, suffering in the purgatory, and the sale of indulgence.[94] Christian life under the medieval church was in bondage by a guilty conscience; preoccupied by works of the law. Under bondage of law, God's grace became conditional. There was no assurance of forgiveness. The watered-down gospel with many strings attached offered no comfort or freedom for believers.[95] That is why Luther, commenting on Gal.5:1, "*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*" in his 1535 Lectures on Galatians, made these harsh remarks against the law:

> *Paul speaks with complete contempt and in an exceedingly reproachful manner about the Law when he calls it a snare of the harshest slavery and of a servile yoke. He does not do this without reason. The wicked notion that the Law justifies clings to the reason very stubbornly, and the whole human race is finally so entangled and conquered by it that it can be rescued only with the utmost difficulty*.[96]

The Reformation did liberate people from the tyranny of the medieval church's grip on people's daily life.[97] Yet fallen human beings are always prone to make the

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[92] *LW* 31:368.

[93] Luther attacks the ecclesiastic/cleric tyranny in *The Freedom of a Christian* with strong remarks: "Through this perversion the knowledge of Christian grace, faith, liberty, and of Christ himself has altogether perished, and its place has been taken by an unbearable bondage of human works and laws" (*LW* 31: 357).

[94] These problems were the major reasons that necessitated Luther to propose the law-gospel distinction and insist on the preeminence of the gospel.

[95] As early as 1517, Luther had already criticized these problems explicitly in his famous Ninety-Five Theses (*LW* 31:19-33). See also, *Avoiding the Doctrines of Men* (*LW* 35:125-153), *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (*LW* 36:10-125), etc.

[96] *LW* 27:7.

[97] In *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther describes the Church's clerical hierarchy "so terrible a

same mistakes in every age and generation. Although without a heavy-handed curia ruling over their lives, people today are still capable, actually fond, of creating for themselves idols of self-salvation that put them under self-imposed bondage. Deep in our fallen nature is the stubborn "*evil, unbelieving heart*" (Heb. 3:12)—that I would rather trust my own resources than God's grace. That is why a good theology for preaching requires more than merely a consistent reasoning or justifiable logic system. It must address these **pastoral concerns** on a sound biblical basis to protect the believers from following their fallen tendency.

Take the theory of law-gospel continuum as an example, in which Christ is treated as an antitype of Moses. This is biblically justifiable if carefully defined, qualified, explained and understood. Yet combined with our proneness to self-reliance, there is almost an inevitable tendency for such a theory to turn Christ into a mere updated and enhanced law-giver, if not *"a taskmaster far harsher than Moses"*.[98] The cross would disappear into the background, and the law would return to the central stage as the remedy for sin. Such a theory thus causes more problems than the insights it might offer for a believer's spiritual life. Luther warns us against such a tendency of human nature:

> *Since human nature and natural reason, as it is called, are by nature superstitious and ready to imagine, when laws and works are prescribed, that righteousness must be obtained through laws and works; and further, since they are trained and confirmed in this opinion by the practice of all earthly lawgivers, it is impossible that they should of themselves escape from the slavery of works and come to a knowledge of the freedom of faith*.[99]

We are not only by nature inclined to works of the law for righteousness, our up-

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tyranny that no heathen empire or other earthly power can be compared with it" (*LW* 31:356).

[98] *LW* 31:368.

[99] *LW* 31: 376.

bringing and cultures train us deeper into that tendency. There is no way we could wake up on our own realization. This says how crucial it is for us to hear the pure gospel as the last word of God. And it is not a mere hypothetical problem Luther imagined. Legalism and moralism actually dominate most sermons in many Protestant churches today. Every preacher knows that if he preaches just to scold people for what is wrong with them, he has inexhaustible sermon topics year round. Preaching the law to demand conformity is a surefire way to construct a sermon, and is guaranteed to make listeners feel "cut to the heart". People are sinners, and they know their lives need improvement. Yet they are not capable of differentiating between the purposes of the law preached to them—for conviction of sins, or for guidance in godly life. How can the preacher achieve the purpose expected?

If the motif of conformity to the law dominants the sermon, especially in its concluding phase; it becomes inevitable for the listeners to override, with the law, whatever the gospel has just offered them. God's grace and forgiveness become conditional upon "if you keep all these instructions from here on". After all, the law is the "mother tongue", while the gospel is foreign, to our old life of flesh. No matter how sophisticated the doctrinal contents are, the listeners, even the preachers themselves, would instinctively embrace what they are most comfortable with in the end: the various merit mentalities toward their own salvation. The "offense of the cross" (Gal.5:11) is stealthily removed and replaced with various forms of merit-based prosperity gospels, that God rewards good behavior with wealth and health, while misfortunes indicate God's displeasure towards certain particular sins in life. People may profess that they are justified by grace, yet are anxious all the time about losing salvation due to what they did, or did not do. As demonstrated by the frustrated church

member at the beginning,[100] there are ceaseless anxieties, frustrations and guilty feelings in pursuing personal holiness based on works of the law.[101]

Likewise, it is often futile to focus on the law as "*that which is restored by the gospel*"[102] and thus the ultimate purpose of the sermon. In theory it can make a good case especially for paraenesis. Yet combined with our sinful human nature, it would foster the idea that justification is merely a thing of the past and therefore much less important than the present spiritual quest for perfection. The focus is then shifted **from the sure foundation of God's justifying grace** to self-centered religious pursuits, inevitably resulting in a heavily guilty conscience devoid of the gospel freedom. And because it is impossible to properly keep the law apart from God's grace, what people make out of "that which is restored by the gospel" is actually **a much softened, discounted law**. The object and basis of faith often becomes, instead of Christ and His cross, **my** decision, **my** determination to move on, or even the steadfastness of **my own** faith. This law-oriented pursuit in Christian life breeds a popular perception in Evangelical Protestant churches that the gospel is for justification in the past, and the law is for present, ongoing sanctification of those already being justified.[103] Therefore, while the message of the law is withheld from un-believers, the gospel is preached only to them alone; a mentality that Christians no longer need the gospel.[104] The results are various forms of "cheap grace"—the modern version of

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[100] See footnote 17 on pp.9-10.

[101] For an analysis of these issues in contemporary western cultures, see, for example, Mark Mattes, "Honoring the Pastoral Dimension of Theology," in *Handing Over the Goods: Determined to Proclaim Nothing but Christ Jesus and Him Crucified -- (A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. James A. Nestingen)* eds. Scott Keith and Steven Paulson (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Publishing House, 2018).

[102] Bavinck's remark, see text and footnote 68 on p.32.

[103] A subtitle in the forward section of Rushdoony's pamphlet says it all: "*The Law Is for Sanctification, Not Justification*". R. J. Rushdoony, *Faith & Obedience: An Introduction to Biblical Law* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2012). Kindle Book location 67 of 574.

[104] It is probably rare to find literature blatantly stating "Christians no longer need the gospel",

antinomianism: we already have the gospel as a ticket to heaven; or, the superficial and unstable assurance of "once saved always saved" mentality based on **my** decision at one time in the past. The shallow reception of justification even renders the priceless holy gospel merely something I do to feel good about. In worse cases, the gospel for many is none other than self-fulfillment no matter by what means that is achieved. For example,

> *. . . the false gospel of contemporary North America is not that you may do as you please but that you must fulfill yourself. For many in our congregations, unfortunately, this is the gospel. This fake gospel can be heard in the pulpits of both right-wing Evangelicals and left-wing mainline Protestants. For the former, if we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, then we can actualize ourselves in a purpose-driven life. For the latter, Jesus is the clue to spirituality, which helps us to live serenely in an impersonal, market-driven world.*[105]

It sounds weird that legalistic pursuits of sanctification could co-exist with antinomianism. But it is no surprise if we consider the fact that the roots of both are the same animal, that is, a mentality of self-reliance, no matter what the end goal it might be. All these phenomena warn us that we must do the ministry of the Word with extreme care and reverence, with pastoral concerns a top priority, rather than mere considerations for theoretical coherency or systematical self-consistency. One may make a case for the law to be God's last word. It can be valid theologically if carefully defined, qualified and explained. Yet the task will be cumbersome and hard for average listeners or even preachers to get a handle on. Preaching the Word according to such logic would always risk the danger of losing sight of the gospel freedom. In this study we will take an approach which, as long as the biblical truth is not com-

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but everywhere I go and talk to pastors, leaders and sincere Christians, at least among Chinese churches, this idea is almost universally present in their minds, in their daily practices, and often also in their ministry agenda. It can also be detected in a vast majority of church sermons.

[105] Mark C. Mattes, "Beyond the Impasse: Re-examining the Third Use of the Law," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 69 (2005): 276-277.

promised, deliberately avoids complicated systems of philosophy and involved theological dialectics. We will tackle homiletical issues pastorally in the most down-to-earth manner in an attempt to make the preaching of biblical messages clear and accessible—for both the common preachers and the listeners. As my seminary professor of homiletics always says, "A good sermon is one which can be understood by children."[106]

These are the reasons we maintain that the gospel must be the last word. When the law, being what **we** should do, becomes the ultimate goal of a sermon, it is irresistible for the listeners, being fallen humans in nature, to turn self-absorbed and render it as involved and complicated as it could be. The nature of all these errors is never different from that of the medieval Pelagianism, which necessitated Luther to propose the law-gospel distinction. Be it legalism, moralism or antinomianism, modern or medieval, the danger is always the same: a stubborn tendency to turn away from pure grace to lean on self-works; thinking that the more sophisticated the works are, the better. In the words of a contemporary Lutheran scholar, it is the "*unhappy habit of turning gospel into law*", fundamentally related to our original sin.[107] The consequence is the loss of gospel joy and freedom, assuming that the gospel itself is not lost altogether.

And the remedy for all these error-prone tendencies also remains the same. That is, preach the Word faithfully with a simple aim to liberate the listeners with the gospel freedom. To be more exact, preach the law and gospel with the gospel always in perspective as the last word. Luther, being himself well-versed in the so-

[106] Lecture notes of Dr. Philip Teng at the Alliance Theological Seminary, Nyack, NY.

[107] Steven Paulson, "The Law-Gospel Dictinction in Lutheran Theology and Ministry," in Jonathan Linebraugh, ed., *God's Two Words: Law and Gospel in the Lutheran and Reformed Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 104.

phisticated medieval scholastic theologies and philosophies, never forget to insist on this simplicity of the gospel. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, he maintains:

> *... although it is good to preach and write about penitence, confession, and satisfaction, our teaching is unquestionably deceitful and diabolical if we stop with that and do not go on to teach about faith*.[108]

Teach about faith! That is, the gospel. He further quotes Paul concerning the core idea of the gospel:

> *'For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all,' as it is stated in Rom. 11[:32]. Thus the promises of God give what the commandments of God demand and fulfill what the law prescribes so that all things may be God's alone, both the commandments and the fulfilling of the commandments. He alone commands, he alone fulfills...*[109]

This is the essence of the law-gospel preaching. When both the law and gospel are preached incisively and the gospel freedom is kept in perspective, we sinners are truly liberated with joy because all things are God's alone—He alone commands, He alone fulfills. This conclusion of what God has done, and will do, for us is exactly the definition of the gospel. Accordingly, we maintain that the law-gospel paradigm is clearly the central biblical motif, in which the law accuses and convicts, in order for God to show mercy to us with forgiveness and comfort in the gospel; and thus our salvation is entirely God's doing, to Him alone be the glory. This is the conviction we insist on for preaching. And based on this conviction, we will approach the issues concerning the "impasse" in preaching paraenesis.

Section Four The "*Simul*" and the Last Word Debate

The discussion above in this Chapter has made a fundamental assumption: we

[108] *LW* 31:364.

[109] *LW* 31:349.

are all sinners and have a tendency to rely on our own works rather than God's grace. In other words, we tend to trust ourselves than God. However, aren't we Christians justified by grace through faith? Doesn't God count us righteous? Aren't we already living under grace? Doesn't Paul say "sin will have no dominion over you"? How can we base our arguments on the premise that we, both the preachers and the listeners, are sinners prone to self-reliance and works of merit?

Luther has a biblical answer ready for these unsettling worries. He reminds us that, although we are justified through faith in Christ, we are not yet, at this stage, "*wholly inner and perfectly spiritual*"; and such persons "*we shall be only at the last day, the day of the resurrection of the dead*".[110] Presently, we still live in the flesh with all its weaknesses.

It is certainly true that as a person is baptized into Christ, something pertaining to God's new creation begins in his/her life (2 Cor. 5:17). Yet **at the same time** he/she still "*live[s] in the flesh*" and "*remains in this mortal life on earth*".[111] This reality is reflected in the biblical language that, within the same Christian exist two "selves", or "men": an "old man" and a "new man".[112] To be precise, despite the fact that a Christian is counted righteous in Christ before God, he remains the same sinner in his own flesh. It is small wonder that traits of wavering faith and self-reliance still tarry in his life.

This vital truth was later refined and coined into the celebrated Reformation dictum known as "***the simul***": *simul iustus et peccator*, that is, *simul*taneously righteous

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[110] *LW* 31:358.

[111] *Ibid*.

[112] E.g., Col. 3:9-10, Eph.4:22-24, etc, where the English masculine "man" is employed to translate the Greek ἄνθρωπος, a human being without emphasis on specifying the gender.

and a sinner.[113] The reality of Christian life on earth articulated by this succinct expression is a major reason we should feel uneasy about preaching the law as God's last word.

The argument for the law to be God's last word is based on the foundation that the regenerate are justified and led by the Spirit. Therefore, what they need now is instruction and guidance of how to follow the Spirit in obeying God's will. This is provided by the law, or more specifically, the "normative use" of the law according to the Reformed theology. Such a line of reasoning is true and biblical, yet not comprehensive enough. It has neglected, or at least excessively downplayed a fact that Christians are still, at the same time, sinners in the flesh, and God's law always accuses a sinner's guilty conscience. Were they not liberated by the gospel as the ultimate truth, the law would only deprive them of the joy of forgiveness, and make them self-conscious, self-justifying and hypocritical; just like it would do to any sinners.

For our present purpose, the point is to show that Christians are still prone to self-reliance and works-righteousness. It can be argued that the (normative use of the) law is indeed the will of God for His redeemed people, thus the perfect guide for Christian life. But it could become tricky as this law is addressed to the Christian as a whole person. Although the preacher should always have a clear purpose to de-

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[113] Although Luther noticed the significance of the truth that as Christians "*in ourselves we are [still] sinners, and yet through faith we are righteous by God's imputation*" as early as 1515 in his comments on Romans 4:7-8 (*LW* 25:260), the *simul* is not his point of argument in *The Freedom of a Christian*. His uses of terminologies such as "the inner/outer man", "spirit", "body" and "flesh" in this treatise are for the purpose of clarifying his teachings on faith and works. They are not directly equivalent to the corresponding elements in the doctrine of the *simul*. However, relevant concepts of this doctrine are nevertheless in the background of the treatise when Luther speaks about justification, faith and works. Thus a thorough understanding of the *simul* is helpful to our appreciation and application of this treatise. According to Winger, a fuller and explicit expression of *simul iustus et peccator* did not appear until 1535 in Luther's Commentary on Galatians. For an analysis of how this doctrine was developed, how it evolved and reached its mature form over the years, and about its relationship to Luther's profound appreciation for the doctrine of justification, see Thomas M. Winger, "Simul Justus et Peccator: Did Luther and the Confessions Get Paul Right?" *Lutheran Theological Review* XVII (Academic Year 2004-05): 90-108.

liver his concluding message, he has no actual control in targeting specifically the "new man" and avoiding the "old man" in that person. Thus the law still speaks to the old man of flesh in him, accuses him and convicts him of his guilty conscience. Now, if we make the law the last word, there is no more word of gospel to forgive and comfort thereafter. This is the same reason we argued earlier that the law cannot be the last word. Sure, everybody agrees that a lifestyle conforming to God's law would be wonderful; yet an attempt to attain it in the absence of the liberating gospel inevitably leads to miserable hypocrisy.

One may argue at this point that the gospel has already been preached. The listeners have already heard and received the gospel. They can apply the gospel truths to themselves to assure themselves of forgiveness, at the same moment they are instructed by the law. But such arguments would actually make the gospel the last word, after all, because the idea of "last word" has to do with the final, decisive "punch" of the Word in the life of a listener, not necessarily the narrative sequence. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the listener, terrified again in the conscience, could remember to apply the gospel truths to his own life at all. If forgiveness and liberation of the gospel is that crucial, why not just preach it explicitly as the last word, anyway?

And we insist this is indeed crucial. When a deadly guilty conscience sees no hope of forgiveness, it has nowhere to turn but deeper into itself. Self-examination without God's liberating word of gospel only makes the person, Christian or not, a worse hypocrite. That is exactly what is happening in many sincere Christians today, misled and oppressed by law-dominated sermons and church teachings.[114] This doctrine of the "*simul*", therefore, has profound significance in the preaching of paraene-

[114] The illustration of a frustrated Christian (pp.9-10, cf. footnote 15) reflects, without exaggeration, a prevalent phenomenon among sincere Christians.

sis, as will be discussed extensively in the following chapters.

Appendix The Choice of the Term "Paraenesis"

In this chapter, we have established that the gospel is God's last Word to us, and thus the final goal of our preaching. In the following chapters, we will start to argue that for that goal, it is still profitable and actually necessary to preach practical applications, and discuss how to properly "*reprove, rebuke, and exhort*" (2 Tim. 4:2) Christians with ethical instructions. In the language of the Lutheran Confessions, this is none other than preaching "the third use of the law". And the initial objective of this study is to tackle the issues of an impasse with respect to this very third use of the law in the first place.[115] However, in the following chapters we will often choose to use the new, uncommon term "paraenesis" instead. A major reason for doing do so is the tendency that people become content with shallow perceptions when the meaning of a term seems obvious in its literal sense, and lose the interest and motivation to appreciate its real significance. "Use of the law" would fit many Christians' preconceived ideas about "law", and the addition of "the third" only requires a simplistic explanation that it is to be preached after the gospel, or, to be applied to Christians.[116] An unsurprising consequence would be "Christian legalism", which is commonplace in sermon conclusions among Evangelical preachers. A more thoughtful outcome might be a Calvinistic normative use of the law for preachers who care to think deeper theologically. But very few outside the Confessional Lutheran circle would have the

[115] Cf. footnote 1 on p.1, and the titles of the source articles.

[116] This is the answer I actually get personally from most Evangelical preachers, including many well-established church leaders.

patience and training to think through, in the context of the *simul*,[117] the mysterious dilemma concerning the relationship between the uncompromising law-gospel distinction and this third use of law which actually liberates like the gospel does. This shallowness is widespread among Evangelical Christians in general, who tend to take familiar doctrinal rich phrases only at their literal surface values and make them into clichés. A ready example is "law and gospel". When I ask a Christian, "Do you know the law and gospel distinction?" The expected answer would always be "Of course I do." Yet in fact, most Christians do not have the least idea of the deep significance and wide implications of the law-gospel distinction. They just take for granted that they know both familiar biblical terms and the two are of course different. A more serious case of superficial understanding is about "justification through faith". This is especially problematic among Chinese Christians, as this term is composed of four Chinese words 因信稱義, and using four-word idioms is a common practice in Chinese culture, so common that people often use them carelessly without thinking seriously about their true meaning, making them empty clichés. And the crucially related expression "by grace" preceding it (Eph. 2:8) is always omitted to fit the requirement of four-word rhythm. A few years back I was interviewed by a senior reporter from a reputable Chinese Christian newspaper for the Reformation 500 celebration. I talked passionately about justification from a Lutheran perspective, as it is the central doctrine of the Reformation. Yet I was baffled and embarrassed when the interview was published a few days later. It was full of moralistic pep talks superficially derived from the slogan "justification through faith", faulty ideas which I was trying to clarify and correct during the interview. The reporter just put all those uninformed, erroneous words in my mouth! I am sure he did not do it out of malice,

[117] The Lutheran doctrine of "simultaneously righteous and a sinner", which will be explained in the next chapter. See also footnote 53 on p.24.

yet that was what he thought I was saying during the interview, when I used the term "justification through faith" repeatedly.

Now, the phrase "use of the law" is familiar and concrete enough for Christians to make up ideas by their own imaginations, while an appropriate understanding of "the third use of the law" is actually much more challenging than that of "justification through faith" or the "law-gospel distinction", which is an objectively fact judged by the intensity of controversies around the term itself. It would take far more than merely knowing the texts of the relevant Articles in the Formula of Concord. One has to be catechized and well-read in a wide range of Lutheran doctrines and has an adept grasp of the whole Formula of Concord as the context to appreciate the paradoxical nature of this "use of law" that liberates. There are legitimate concerns that the term "the third use of the law" could be conflated, by Christians in general, with the law in its "second use" (cf., Rom. 3:20, Gal. 2:16), and thus confuse the "works of the law" with works of love done in the gospel freedom by the listeners.[118]

We need to stay on course that the objective of this study is to help preachers who are struggling with issues pertaining to the alleged homiletical "impasse". For them, this study serves as

> *. . . an encouragement with exhortation, advice and admonishment for preachers of the Word . . . to help preachers who employ Martin Luther's law-gospel preaching paradigm to be able to 'reprove, rebuke, and exhort' confidently without apologizing, and without compromising the impacts of the law-gospel preached.*[119]

We do recognize that for some preachers who are well-trained in Lutheran theologies and Confessions, there may not be such an impasse in the first place. They know exactly what they are doing when they preach the law and gospel with applica-

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[118] Good works done in love for our neighbor will be explicated extensively later in chapter five.

[119] p. 9.

tions in the third use of the law. They catechize their parishioners with pure doctrines and practices in the gospel joy and freedom. They know with certainty that "*in the present life . . . believers are, by the spirit of their mind, in a constant struggle against the flesh*" and "*it is needful that the Law of the Lord always shine before them*".[120] They preach the third use of the law in sermon applications with a clear perspective that it now fosters the "fruits of the Spirit" in the new life of the regenerate:

> *The fruits of the Spirit are the works which the Spirit of God who dwells in believers works through the regenerate, and which are done by believers so far as they are regenerate [spontaneously and freely],* ***as though they knew of no command, threat, or reward****; for in this manner the children of God live in the Law and walk according to the Law of God . . .*[121]

These preachers do not experience the difficulties of the afore-mentioned impasse, thus have little need for advice from the arguments in this study, and the term "the third use of the law" works fine with them. However, an overwhelming majority of Christian preachers are not in this category. There always exists a need for careful guidance and constant reminders for preachers in every generation, to steer them away from the pitfalls of errors in preaching practical applications. For this purpose, the choice of terminology matters greatly. Here, a new, uncommon term "paraenesis" is advantageous in several ways.

Firstly, it is rarely used in English outside the biblical academia. There is little likelihood it can become a cliché. Readers just can not intuitively assign or creatively invent meanings to it until they really learn about it. Although its tentative Chinese counterpart "勸勉" is a more common term with moralistic overtones, it is nevertheless too abstract, in comparison to the "use of law" (律法的功用), for the

[120] FC Ep VI. 4.

[121] FC Ep VI. 6, boldface emphasis mine.

readers to associate with it any stereotyped ideas. It is a more or less comprehensive concept with its contents to be filled in, such as for courage, for diligence or for other directives. Employing the term could invite Chinese readers to look further into the contents rather than assume certain preconceived substance to it.

An additional advantage of the term paraenesis is **the general and practical nature** of its connotation. The Greek verb *παραινέω*, according to EDNT, is

> . . . ***more general*** *than the ancient rhetorical term παραινέσις*[122], '*practical hortatory speech*'. . . and the modern technical term *'admonitions of general ethical contents' addressed to a specific audience*.[123]

This verb in the New Testament means *"give urgent advice, without per se the weight of authority, but* ***entirely practical***".[124] Its meaning is "*somewhere between the commanding παραγγέλλω. . . and the warm παρακαλέω*",[125] both of the latter words appear far more frequently in the New Testament. Thus paraenesis as the noun has a wide-range of general meanings, denoting a form of communication with practical contents. It suggests various ideas of comfort/consolation, encouragement, exhortation, admonition, rebuke or instruction. It is indeed a fitting term to denote the practical application part of a law-gospel sermon, without the concern to be spoken of as a cliché. Therefore, we will often employ this term instead of the third use of the law in the following chapters. Additional explanations on the differences of

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[122] *Παραινέσις* is an extra-biblical Greek word meaning "exhortation". Cf. Benjamin J. Petroelje, "Constructing Paul, (Dis)Placing Ephesians: The Pauline Book and the Dilemma of Ephesians" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2018), 132, footnote 73.

[123] Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol.3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 22, boldface emphasis mine.

[124] *Ibid*., boldface emphasis mine.

[125] Balz and Schneider, EDNT Vol.3, 22. *Παραγγέλλω*, Strong's number G3853, translated in Acts into "command" (10:42, 16:18, 17:30), "order" (1:4, 15:5, 16:23, 23:30) or "charge" (4:18, 5:28,40, , 23:22), etc. *Παρακαλέω*, Strong's number G3870, meaning "to call near", translated in Acts into "urge" (16:9,15, 21:12, 25:2, 27:33,34), "comfort" (20:12), "exhort" (2:40, 11:23), encourage (14:22, 15:32, 20:2) or "beg" (13:42, 24:4), etc.

these two terms will be discussed in relation to good works and the purported impasse in chapter five, section four-4 (pp. 111-114).

Chapter Three
The *Simul* and Justification

Section One The *Simul* and a Fuller Experience of Freedom

The "*Simul*", this reality of "two men" in a Christian, has far-reaching implications for Christian life, way beyond the debate over God's last word. Luther made his case for this vital truth right at the beginning of *The Freedom of a Christian*, in order to develop his elaborated arguments later on grace versus work merits, faith and justification, love and good works, etc. . . :

> *Man has a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily one. . . . According to the spiritual nature, which men refer to as the soul, he is called a spiritual, inner, or new man. According to the bodily nature, which men refer to as flesh, he is called a carnal, outward, or old man.*[126]

The language here is, of course, not to be understood strictly literally. It describes "*two distinct conditions of the human nature of a Christian, with and without the corruption of sin*", according to Cwirla.[127] These two conditions co-exist in the same Christian throughout the whole time during his life on earth. Nevertheless, this

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[126] *LW* 31:344. Luther's point of argument here in *The Freedom of a Christian* is not to expound on the doctrine of the *simul* per se, but to explicate concepts of grace, faith, justification and good works of love in contrast to work merits. See footnote 113 for further resources on the development of the doctrine of the *simul*.

[127] William M. Cwirla, "On Being Simul—Scriptural Elucidations and Pastoral Applications," *Logia* XXV-4 (2016): 7-15, 7.

fact that there are "*these two men in the same man*"[128] is more than just intriguing. These two "men" actually don't get along. Luther points out the consequent conflicts existing in a Christian:

> *Because of this diversity of nature the Scriptures assert contradictory things concerning the same man, since these two men in the same man contradict each other, "for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh," according to Gal. 5[:17].*[129]

Such conflicts could, and should, cause tremendous anguish in a Christian's life, to the point that Paul would exclaim for every one of us: "*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" (Rom.7:24) However, in light of the theology of the cross,[130] this anguish and the struggles in life may not be bad after all. As Luther shows in *The Freedom of a Christian*, this ironical co-existence actually has a lot to do with the secret of fully experiencing the gospel freedom!

Through faith, the Word of God—the gospel, gives life and power to the "new/inner man" in the Christian that he becomes, before God, justified and spiritually "*a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none*".[131] And that is not yet the whole picture of the good news. Assurance in his/her justification and appreciation for his/her undeserving freedom in Christ leads to genuine good works out of love for his/her neighbor. In so doing, he/she becomes "*a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all*";[132] and even in this total servitude confined to this mortal life on earth, the new man can prevail over the old so that he/she as a whole person is truly free be-

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[128] *LW* 31:344.

[129] *Ibid*.

[130] See Martin Luther, *Theses #20-24* in *The Heidelberg Disputation*. Especially the *Proof to Thesis* #24: "…He neither boasts if he does good works, nor is he disturbed if God does not do good works through him..." *LW* 31:55.

[131] *LW* 31:344.

[132] *Ibid*.

cause he/she is doing so voluntarily and joyfully in love, apart from any motives of obligation or merit for justification.[133]

These two basic propositions which set the structure of Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian*[134]— that a Christian is both a "*free lord of all"* and a *"dutiful servant of all"*, are the keys to the secret of our freedom in preaching paraenesis. In the following study, we will try to discover the secret from the Scriptures and Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian*.

Section Two The Link between the *Simul* and Justification

Luther is probably best known to Christians today for his insistence on the doctrine of justification through faith. Yet much fewer might realize that there is a crucial link between this doctrine and the subject we are discussing here; that is, the doctrine of the *Simul*. In fact, one cannot truly comprehend the rich contents and overwhelming power in the doctrine of justification without a clear understanding of the "*Simul*"! And it is actually vice versa: Luther could capture the gist of the *Simul* because his ever deepening appreciation for the doctrine of justification.[135] Once we begin to grasp the essence of these doctrines, we can never be content with preaching moralism, legalism or the "cheap grace".

This is how Luther starts his main discussions in *The Freedom of a Christian*:

"*First, let us consider the inner man to see how a righteous, free, and pious*

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[133] *LW* 31:358.

[134] Introduction of Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther*, translated by Timothy Wengert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016), Kindle edition.

[135] Thomas M. Winger, "Simul Justus et Peccator: Did Luther and the Confessions Get Paul Right?" *Lutheran Theological Review* XVII (Academic Year 2004-05): 90-108.

Christian, that is, a spiritual, new, and inner man, becomes what he is."[136]

It already implies that a Christian's righteousness/justification has everything to do with the new man within. Luther's insight is that justification is purely God's work, and it operates only in and through the "inner man" in us. These aspects, that our justification is completely God's grace without any contributions from our works, and that this righteousness from God works in and upon the new man but not the old man of a Christian; deserve further elaborations.

"Grace alone" might be a slogan shared by Christians across the board, yet our grasp of it could be superficial and have missed the main thrust altogether. It is possible for us to agree on grace alone, yet still preach various versions of merit-based "spiritual pursuits" unknowingly.

In confronting these erroneous quests for spirituality, Luther insists:

> "*One thing*, *and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom*. . . . *That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ*".[137]

Citing various Scriptures, Luther maintains that all the new man in a Christian needs is the gospel:

> ". . . *the soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is no help at all for the soul*".[138]

And this "Word of God" is nothing other than the intentionally defined "gospel"[139] in Luther's mind, as he explains:

> *You may ask, "What then is the Word of God, . . . since there are so many words of God?" I answer: The Apostle explains this in Romans 1. The Word is*

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[136] *LW* 31:344

[137] *LW* 31:345

[138] Ibid.

[139] As explained in chapter two, section two, the use of the term "gospel" is here endowed with specific, restricted meanings, p.35, 37.

the gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies.[140]

What Luther is getting at is far more than just a common high view of the Bible. There is a profound reverence for God's grace in justification and a deep appreciation for the gospel. Luther learned early on both from the Scripture and personal experiences that various types of unrighteousness still existed in the life of a Christian.[141] This reality stood in fierce tension with many other parts of the Scripture on the perfect righteousness of the regenerate.[142]

It grew clearer to him during the early years (1513 on) when he taught the Bible at Wittenberg University, that justification was purely a gift of God. It is "God's righteousness" to sinners as a gift.[143] No human imagination could have invented it. No human works could have ever produced or helped it. And most importantly, since it is entirely God's, it is thorough, complete, perfect, powerful and certainly efficacious. But why, then, do Christians still harbor unrighteous thoughts and deeds in their lives? Struggling with the conflict between the two biblical realities and pursuing ways to a righteous life, Luther eventually discovered in the Scriptures the crux of the matter — the *Simul*: that a Christian is *Simul*taneously righteous and a sinner, as long as his bodily life remains here on earth.[144]

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[140] *LW* 31:346.

[141] Bainton H. Roland, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin Books, 1950), 41-48.

[142] E.g., "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph.5:9), "sin will have no dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14); and "…No one born of God makes a practice of sinning . . . and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.…" (1 John 3:9), etc.

[143] See Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (Coromandel East, Australia: New Creation Publications, 1995). See also Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, 46-47.

[144] Winger, "Simul Justus et Peccator" *Lutheran Theological Review* XVII: 91-92.

What this breakthrough avails him is far more than a compromise between two conflicting biblical claims. It greatly deepens Luther's understanding of the true meaning and profound implications of justification. What might be commonly perceived as a one time forensic transaction of imputation is actually a continual demonstration of God's grace in Christ throughout the entire span of a believer's life on this side of glory. It powerfully proclaims the comforting promises that God's perfect righteousness is always ours, here and now. And more wonderfully, our present weaknesses, failures and sins can never harm this righteousness we have received. With such a realization that the gift of justification and its fruits can always be experienced and enjoyed in the daily life of every Christian in this world, our appreciation for the true gospel is affirmed and deepened. This realization reflects what the Apostle Paul says in the Scripture, "*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him*" (1 Cor. 2:9). Its manifold ramifications are further explicated in the next Section.

Section Three The Perfect New Man and the Irreparable Old Man

1. *The New Man: God's Righteousness as a Gift to Us*

A common misconception of the *simul* is that it means nothing more than "Nobody is perfect anyway." Nothing could be farther from the truth discovered by Luther here. The *Simul* is in fact about the **perfect** righteousness of God to us as a gift, fully enjoyed by the "new man" in us here and now. That is why the Scripture makes assertions like "*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God*" (1 Jn.3:9). On appearance this verse is in head-on contradiction to another part of

the same Epistle, "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (1 John 1:8). Yet Lutheran scholars have no problem in pointing out the doctrine of the *simul* here,[145] that the one "*born of God*" is the perfect new man in a Christian, while the same person still sins during his/her time on earth because the temporary existence of the (albeit abolished) old man.

On the other hand, denying the *simul* here would cause not only the exegetical impasse that John is contradicting himself in the same Letter; it also complicates the pastoral issue of Christian sinning, that one can be born of God and still sin. To accommodate the difficulties, the reading of 1 John 3:9 would be slanted towards a compromised interpretation that a Christian does not keep on sinning "habitually", implying that occasional sinning in isolated cases is permissible. Such a way of thinking would miss the main emphasis of this verse—a state of constant absence of sin in the one born of God.[146] This emphasis is especially obvious in context of the passage 1 John 3:1-9; especially with the previous verse, "*Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil . . . The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil* " (1 John 3:8). The whole passage stresses the assurance of freedom from sin, even though this reality might not yet be reflected in the external feelings and observable behaviors in a Christian's life, and that is because the "old man" is more visible outwardly for the time being (cf. 1 John 3:2). But it is definitely a

[145] See, for example, Cwirla, "On Being Simul," Logia XXV-4 (2016): 7. Similar interpretation is held also by non-Lutheran scholars, for example, from an Anglican commentator, see Alfred Plummer, *Commentary on the Epistles of St. John*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1894).

[146] The Greek text "ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ" with the verb ποιεῖ in present tense can simply mean "does/practice no sin". Similarly, "οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν", also with a present tense verb δύναται (is able to) and the present infinitive verb "ἁμαρτάνειν (sin)", can mean "is not able to sin". It is true that Greek present tense often indicates a constant, habitual activity, thus the ESV translation "*makes a practice of sinning*" and "*cannot keep on sinning*". Correct as it can be, it is hard for the English translation to fully convey the connotation of a constant absence of sin. Readers could take it the other way to mean that the "*one born of God"* merely sins less often, a compromise not substantiated by the text.

wonderful gift already given us according to God's firm Word of promise. Ignoring the *simul* would miss the comfort, freedom, assurance and invigorating power of our justification in daily life.[147] The doctrine of the *simul* is thus indeed an essential element of the liberating gospel for all Christians struggling for a righteous life. Our righteousness is born of God in a new life which is purely the merit of Christ the Son of God. We can do nothing ourselves to increase or improve it. There are no degrees to measure or levels to grade this righteousness. Actually its sublimity is way beyond our wildest imaginable dreams. In Christ we are perfectly righteous before God, period. There is no need for going about justifying ourselves as if we can somehow be righteous in ourselves, or increase our degree of holiness.

2. *The Old Man: Beyond Repair*

There, to be sure, remains the problem of sin. Yet the root cause we still struggle with sins in life has now been exposed. It is not that God's righteousness is imperfect or inefficacious, but that the old man of flesh still tarries in us for the time being. It is useless trying to externally improve our behavior: "*Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works*", Luther insists, just like the tree must be good to bear good fruit, not vice versa.[148] But the old man is not, and will not be, good. It is simply not in God's plan to "improve" that temporary outward

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[147] For example, John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, TNTC vol.19 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 135-6. Stott rejects the essence of the *simul* as the explanation for 1 John 3:9 and its apparent contradiction to 1:8, for the reason that "*we cannot ascribe an act to one of our two natures in such a way as to distinguish ourselves from it*". He does note Paul saying "*it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me*" (Rom. 7:17), but explains that Paul's purpose is "*not to deny that he is himself acting sinfully, but . . . to explain why his behaviour conflicts with his will*". Yet this is exactly the same manner we understand and apply the doctrine of the *simul* to 1 John (see p.54 and footnote 127). Stott's reluctance to understand 1 John 3:9 in light of the *simul* forces him to conclude "*if he [a Christian] should continue to sin, it would indicate that he has never been born again*" (*ibid.* 131). While this statement is a logical explication of 1 John3:9, it could be detrimental for readers who are innately self-reliant; if it is perceived only as law to convict them. It would blur the focus on the assurance of a sinless birth and the gift of God's seed, causing unfounded anxieties and doubts which are neither advocated in this passage nor elsewhere in the Bible.

[148] *LW* 31:361.

man for our righteousness, definitely not in ways and for purposes we could think of or would like to![149] God has a different idea to deal with our problem of sin: take the old man off like dirty clothes, and put on something brand new:

> *. . . to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness* (Eph 4:22–24).

This Scriptural passage, as well as many other similar ones, shows clearly that the old man is beyond repair. It can only get worse. Yet the new man is perfectly righteous to begin with.

The point here is now clear. It is not hard to agree that our justification is God's work, not ours. Yet what we are seldom aware of is the fact that this work of God does not make the old man of flesh better, in the sense that it becomes less sinful or more righteous. Luther noted this important difference early (1515) in his lectures on Romans, as Winger observes in Luther's comments on Romans 4:7-8:

> "*Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven [ἀφίημι], and whose sins are covered [ἐπικαλύπτω]; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon [λογίζομαι] his sin*." *. . . For all three verbs ["forgiven", "covered", and "not imputed"] imply that* ***the sin remains****, but that the sinner is no longer guilty for it.*[150]

Here Paul in Romans 4 is quoting Psalm 32 to argue that justification is purely of God's doing. The argument demonstrates not only that human works are not involved, but also human sin is not actually removed! What happens to a sinner in justification is that God no longer "reckon" his sin on him. Luther concluded: "*Thus in ourselves we are sinners, and yet through faith we are righteous by God's imputa-*

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[149] God does have a plan to make it a vessel for good works, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, but not at all for our righteousness.

[150] Winger, *Simul Justus et Peccator,* 91, boldface emphasis mine.

tion."[151] And this naturally leads to Luther's understanding of the "*Simul*" in Romans 7: "*Therefore I am **at the same time** a sinner and a righteous man. . . , for I do evil and I hate the evil which I do*."[152]

3. *Faith Works through the New Man*

In this twofold existence of a Christian, his old man of flesh remains the same sinner it used to be. God's justifying grace, i.e., God's righteousness given to him, is for sure efficacious, yet only in the new, inner man in him.

In fact, the new man exists exactly by the working of God's justifying grace. Luther describes how a new man comes into being in the life of the repentant sinner:

> *When you have learned this you will know that you need Christ, who suffered and rose again for you so that, if you believe in him, you may through this faith **become a new man** in so far as your sins are forgiven and you are justified by the merits of another, namely, of Christ alone.*[153]

We should note here that the context of the above reference is Luther, quoting Romans (3:23, 10-12, etc.), showing that "*all things in you are altogether blameworthy, sinful, and damnable*", i.e., the old man is irreparable. Our hope is not in trying the best to make it better, but being convinced "*that you need Christ*", and through faith becoming the new man. Luther further argues that all external works we do have no effect on this new, inner man. At the same time, God's justifying work operates only in the new man: ". . . *this faith can rule **only in the inner man**, as Rom. 10[:10] says, 'For man believes with his heart and so is justified,'. . .*"[154]

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[151] *LW* 25:260.

[152] *LW* 25:63 Boldface emphasis mine.

[153] *LW* 31:347 Boldface emphasis mine.

[154] *Ibid*., boldface emphasis mine.

By inference, faith does not operate in the outward, old man at all.[155] What God does through faith in a Christian is giving life to and empowering the new man who is righteous, rather than modifying, improving or repairing his old man of flesh. Our flesh is not, and cannot be, improved progressively after we are justified by grace, contrary to the common (albeit unfounded) belief of many sincere Christians.

This is actually the most liberating aspect of the doctrine of the *simul*. It not only offers us a firm foundation of assurance that does not depend on our own performance, but also completely frees us from our natural tendency of self-improvement, and re-directs our ways of pursuit for holiness. All my own works of improvement can only be done to my old, outward man; yet God never meant to improve this man of flesh for my justification and salvation. Knowing this truth liberates us from the endless pursuit of self-improvement, the cycles of pride-guilt along the way, and the inescapable hypocrisy. This new freedom, overlooked by most Christians, offers a broad new perspective on our preaching of paraenesis, while at the same time keeps us safe from many common pitfalls of preaching.

[155] To put it more precisely, faith, rather than improving the old man, enables and empowers the new man to prevail over the old. This point will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

Chapter Four
The *Simul* and Faith Alone

Section One Life in the *Simul*

1. *The Constant Conflict Within*

What we are trying to establish in the previous Chapter is that in a Christian, the new man is already righteous, while the sinful old man cannot be improved. This condition of *simul* liberates us from pursuits for holiness by our own works of merit, or impractical expectations of progressive sanctification. However, we must face the reality more comprehensively. These coexisting two "men" don't get along, as we have pointed out earlier. The struggle between the flesh and the Spirit within is going on all the time, as Paul puts it:

> *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do* (Gal. 5:17),

This is no surprise. In the discussions of the *simul* in chapter three, we have already argued that two mutually exclusive realities do coexist in the same person. Conflict is inevitable. Actually it is happening continually. There is a constant spiritual warfare between the flesh and the Spirit; or, between the old and new men in us. And every time it happens, we would habitually side with the old man of flesh unless, by some means or other, the new man prevails. It causes the Apostle Paul to make his well-known exclamation "*Wretched man that I am!*":

> *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members an-*

other law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom.7:22-24)

To be sure, the final triumph is already destined. The old man of sin has been abolished (Rom. 6:6). It is being phased out with the perishing flesh, and will linger only till the moment we enter into glory. On the other hand, the new man will live into eternity. The promise in God's Word is certain:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

Yet this eschatological hope does not always guarantee present victory. How do we face the constant conflicts in the mundane life here and now? Can we really practice "*…live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God*" (1 Peter 4:2)? What should we do in order to "*walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" (Rom. 8:4)? Should we actively suppress the flesh so the new man might manifest; or just resign ourselves and leave it to God's mercy? These are questions we must answer when preaching paraenesis. We may start well by listening to the wise counsel from a Lutheran pastor:

Being Simul is never a license or excuse for sin. Instead, the Christian as a New Man is actively engaged in an ongoing spiritual struggle against his old nature.[156]

The issue is how to engage in this spiritual warfare within. One of the main purposes for us to preach paraenesis is to empower the new man within each Christian to prevail over the old in this extended spiritual warfare of daily life. Even though it might not be the only purpose, our preaching must not ignore paraenesis preaching which liberates and empowers the new man to prevail over the old man.

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[156] William M. Cwirla, "On Being Simul—Scriptural Elucidations and Pastoral Applications," *Logia* XXV-4 (2016): 7-15, 11.

2. *The Quest for Victory*

There exists a host of systems for spiritual formation in different Christian traditions, variously claiming to help Christians live victoriously. Many of these are indeed founded on biblical grounds.[157] Even so, in actual practices one can very easily stray into exercises of will power, determination, habitual activities and self-cultivation. As we have pointed out earlier, the self-reliant tendency is too deeply ingrained in human nature. This is particularly problematic when the method employed involves complicated theories and elaborated processes. Such a system demands too much attention to the method and process; thus distracts the person from the simplicity of gospel freedom and draws him deep into struggles within himself.[158] When spiritual disciplines, sophisticated as they might be, are exercised in the absence of the gospel, they become nothing more than secular moralism plus scattered Bible verses as proof-texts.

Against these errors Luther would have fought fiercely, if he knew them being practiced in church. " . . . *no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom*". Not only the *"work[s] that can be done by the body and in the body*", but even "*prays, fasts, abstains . . . contemplation, meditation, . . .* ",[159] Luther would hold that these things, even those we usually deem spiritually good and things we often preach in paraenesis, are not profitable.[160] Insisting that "t*he soul*

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[157] Donald L. Alexander, Editor *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988).

[158] For example, William Perkins' "*A Golden Chain*" of *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) is well-known to the Puritan world. It is a biblically credible theology of sanctification, (although Lutherans might disagree with the progressive nature of the order) but the "chain" is so long, involved and interwoven all over, it is very hard for an ordinary believer to use it for daily spiritual disciplines without losing focus of the cross, actually losing sight of Christ altogether, during the long and involved journey of sanctification. See: William Perkins, *A Golden Chain* (New Zealand: Titus Books, 2014) Kindle edition.

[159] *LW* 31:345.

[160] *LW* 31:345. Luther is so audacious to even claim that not doing these good works does not

can do without anything except the Word of God", he argues persuasively that whatever works we can think of doing apart from the cross of Christ, the same can also be done by hypocrites.[161] They cannot be relied upon to produce a true Christian; neither can they be trusted for victories in the struggles between the new and old men.

3. *Faith Alone Overcomes*

Then, what does it take for the inner man to overcome the outward man, if whatever we can think of doing is futile? Here, Luther's insight on faith goes a long way. We have seen already that all the inner man of a Christian needs is the Word of God. Now, the objectively existing Word must be received subjectively to be effective, in order to empower the inner man and overcome the flesh. Thus the question becomes "How can the Word of God be efficaciously applied in my life?"

On this Luther ardently contends that it takes nothing else but faith alone: "*The Word of God cannot be received . . . by any works whatever but only by faith.*" Here is Luther's version of "faith alone" in *The Freedom of a Christian*:

> *To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it* ***believes*** *the preaching.* ***Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God****, according to Rom. 10[:9]: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Furthermore, "Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified" [Rom. 10:4]. Again, in Rom. 1[:17], "He who through faith is righteous shall live." The Word of God cannot be received and cherished by any works whatever but only by faith. Therefore it is clear that, as the soul needs only the Word of God for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by faith alone and not any works.*[162]

In short, it does not take involved systems of works, or arduous spiritual disci-

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harm the inner man. He then qualifies this statement by pointing out that "good tree bears good fruits": good works don't make a man good; he must be a good man first to do good works. See further discussions in chapter five, section two of this study.

[161] *LW* 31:345.

[162] *LW* 31:346, boldface emphasis mine.

plines, to overcome the flesh. What we need is simple faith! Every time the conflict between the inner and outward men is stirred up, we exercise faith, and faith alone! This keen insight makes a complicated task simple and focused. Preaching paraenesis means promoting faith. It is liberating for both the preachers and the listeners of paraenesis. Yet first, we must clarify what it means by "faith alone".

Section Two Faith Alone—What Does It Mean?

1. *Faith—What It Is Not*

Now, "faith alone" is a conviction shared by all Protestants since the Reformation. Why do so many of them overlook it and pursue other complicated, difficult ways of sanctification? The question has a lot to do with the common misconceptions about this saving faith. People have experienced various confusion and disappointments due to all kinds of wrong ideas and expectations about faith, to a point they pay only lip service to uphold the doctrine of faith alone. In real life, you've got to have something more effective. We will discuss some prevalent wrong ideas about faith alone.

Not a Virtue

The medieval church thought of faith as a chief "virtue" to be formed by works of love. Luther objects to this idea and contends that faith is far superior to any "virtues" attainable by our own works. Right at the opening of *The Freedom of a Christian* Luther sarcastically wrote off the idea of faith as a personal "virtue": "*Many people have considered Christian faith an easy thing, and not a few have [even] given it a place among the virtues*!"[163] By inference, it could then become a condition I must meet to receive God's grace. Down the road "justification by faith" would be-

[163] *LW* 31:343.

come me exercising my faith to gain my justification from God.

This kind of misconception is actually evident in churches today with loose theological convictions and popular easy-believism. In certain faith-healing occasions, for example, those not healed are blamed for their lack of faith. Faith is actually treated, although not explicitly said, as a merit, the work I do to earn God's favor. Other examples are a whole array of positive thinking preachers. "Having faith" actually implies I have faith in my faith, not in Christ. Preaching faith as a personal virtue, even implicitly, only drives the listeners to do self-centered soul searching apart from Christ; and when no virtue is found inside, to behave as if there is something. It is moralism which leads to hypocrisy.

Not Mere Affirmation of Right Doctrines

At the other end, Christians serious about their theological orthodoxy tend to consider faith to be knowledge of the Scripture and agreement on right doctrines. This is appealing because we are talking about correct things that can be proved by biblical standards. People cannot point a finger at something and show us wrong. Thus the more I know the Bible and affirm right doctrines, the better my faith is. In excessive cases, my knowledge and command of theology could become my idol and my god, keeping me from turning to the loving Father who justifies me at the cost of His Son's life.

Luther lamented this phenomenon in the church's aloof relationship with God, that what is left at best is some knowledge of historical facts about Christ:

> *. . . it is not enough or in any sense Christian to preach the works, life, and words of Christ as historical facts, as if the knowledge of these would suffice for the conduct of life; yet this is the fashion among those who must today be regarded as our best preachers.*[164]

[164] *LW* 31:357.

The real danger is that these preachers are rarely aware of their errors, because they are likely very proud of their orthodoxy. They are quick to judge the errors in others' faith, not realizing the listeners' faith depends on what is preached to them. The true colors of their problem will only be exposed when they, both the preachers and listeners, face the spiritual warfare within. When conflicts between the new man with the old arise, mere knowledge does not help people to overcome their sins in daily lives. There is no paraenesis to empower, forgive or comfort them.

Not a Supplement to Works

Either taking faith as a virtue or a set of doctrines would render it completely ineffective in our spiritual life. And legalistic preaching of paraenesis would only enhance these errors. Yet a worse error about faith is using it in conjunction with, and as a supplement to, works of merit. Luther vehemently argues that the soul "*needs only the Word of God for its life and righteousness, so it is justified* ***by faith alone*** *and not any works*".[165] In the first part of *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther gave a lengthy discourse demonstrating that "*A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none*". Near the end of the discourse, he emphatically made this point again:

> *. . . a Christian is free from all things and over all things so that he needs no works to make him righteous and save him, since faith alone abundantly confers all these things. Should he grow so foolish, however, as to presume to become righteous, free, saved, and a Christian by means of some good work, he would instantly lose faith and all its benefits, a foolishness aptly illustrated in the fable of the dog who runs along a stream with a piece of meat in his mouth and, deceived by the reflection of the meat in the water, opens his mouth to snap at it and so loses both the meat and the reflection.*[166]

To appreciate the reason why faith is so incompatible with works for justification and freedom, we must turn to Luther's characterization of what faith truly means and

[165] *LW* 31:346.

[166] *LW* 31:356.

does to a Christian.

2. *Faith—What It Does*

Faith Clings to God's Promises

Luther claims that "*true faith in Christ is a treasure beyond comparison which brings with it complete salvation and saves man from every evil*",[167] which no human works could come even close. In making the law-gospel distinction in terms of God's commands and promises, Luther assured his readers:

> *Thus the promises of God give what the commandments of God demand and fulfil what the law prescribes so that all things may be God's alone, both the commandments and the fulfilling of the commandments. He alone commands, he alone fulfils.*[168]

It shows how firm God's promises are. In such a context of assurance, the soul which clings to God's promises with a firm faith "*will be so closely united with them [God's promises]"* and *"will share in all their power*".[169] The source from which faith derives power to overcome sin is not any good work or all good works, but God's sure promises. "*This is that Christian liberty, our faith . . . makes the law and works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and salvation*."[170]

Faith Honors God As God

A further insight of Luther is faith, and faith alone, honors God in a manner no human works is capable of:

> *[Faith] honors Him whom it trusts with the most reverent and highest regard since it considers Him truthful and trustworthy. There is no other honor equal to the estimate of truthfulness and righteousness with which we honor Him whom we trust. Could we ascribe to a man anything greater than truthfulness*

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[167] *LW* 31:347.

[168] *LW* 31:349.

[169] *Ibid.*

[170] *LW* 31:350.

and righteousness and perfect goodness?[171]

Faith honors God over everything, especially my own feelings and experiences. There is nothing else from us created human beings that can honor God like faith does. The only way we can look upon God as God is by faith. It is the trusting relationship with God that can only be "*tasted*" by a believer in the trials and struggles of life: "*But one who has had even a small taste of faith can never write, speak, reflect, or hear enough about it*".[172]

Faith is regarded so highly, that no virtue of our own is worth showing. Any good knowledge or doctrine is simply dead cold in comparison. And sure enough, no human work, no matter how good or magnificent, could help or improve it any bit. On the contrary, adding our own works to faith only shows our lack of total trust, our suspicion and our contempt for God with respect to our relationship to Him:

> *. . . there is no way in which we can show greater contempt for a man than to regard him as false and wicked and to be suspicious of him, as we do when we do not trust him.*[173]

That is how incompatible faith is with works!

<u>*Faith leads to Obedience*</u>

Therefore, faith is the "*very highest worship of God*". Through faith, what the soul affirms is God's will, not mere good doctrines. It firmly trusts and clings to God's promises, ascribes to Him everything truthful, trustworthy, righteous and wise. A necessary consequence is that such a soul is most obedient to God, and completely fulfills God's commandments:

> *Is not such a soul most obedient to God in all things by this faith? What commandment is there that such obedience has not completely fulfilled? What*

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[171] *LW* 31:350

[172] *Ibid*.

[173] *Ibid*.

more complete fulfilment is there than obedience in all things?[174]

It should be noted that there is a debate over whether justification according to Luther is purely forensic (being declared righteous) or effective (being made righteous) too.[175] The discussion here indicates he who honors God by faith is most obedient. That is certainly manifested in his ethical behavior in fulfilling all the commandments. In addition to claiming as his own Christ's perfect fulfillment of God's commandments (forensic), he actually fulfills them in his life of obedience (effective). It must be cautioned, though, that these ethical effects are not an improvement of the essential qualities, that he becomes holier in himself. Nor is it some kind of mystical divination[176] of his spirituality; but a dynamical relationship with Christ who is *extra nos*. This will be discussed in the next Section. Suffice to say here that this obedience cannot be produced by works, but by faith alone. That is why even good works could become rebellion when they are done apart from faith:

> *. . . what greater rebellion against God,. . . what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise? For what is this but to make God a liar or to doubt that he is truthful?—that is, to ascribe truthfulness to one's self but lying and vanity to God? Does not a man who does this deny God and set himself up as an idol in his heart? Then of what good are works done in such wickedness, even if they were the works of angels and apostles?*[177]

By this Luther has denied any work-righteousness of its role in our spiritual life. In the daily struggles between the new and old men, faith alone is the key to victory.

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[174] *LW* 31:350.

[175] See Mark Mattes, "Luther on Justification as Forensic and Effective" in Robert Kolb, et al, editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 264-272.

[176] "*Theosis*", an idea of the Orthodox Church, is employed by the "New Finnish School of Lutheran Theology" in relation to the union with Christ. See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2005), 22-23. This view is controversial, to say the least, and has been rejected by many Lutheran scholars.

[177] *LW* 31:350-351.

Faith Facilitates the Joyful Exchange

One more thing of Luther's deep insights into faith is that "*it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom*".[178] Human marriages are but faint reflections of this one true marriage where Christ and the soul become one flesh (Eph. 5:31-32). Everything they have they hold in common, "*the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own*", and "*whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own*". Luther portrays what is happening when a sinner turns to Christ in faith:

> *Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's . . .* [179]

This is Luther's famous "joyful exchange".[180] It describes, in the context of the *Simul*, what happens in the process depicted in Ephesians, ". . . *to put off your old man, . . . and to put on the new man*" (Eph. 4:22-24), where faith is the key and sole agent for the exchange. This "union with Christ through faith" according to Luther is the least sophisticated "theory" among all theologians who embarked on the discussions of this topic of union with Christ, including the early Church Fathers, the Medieval Scholastic "Sophists" and notably the Puritans a century later. Instead of elaborated theologies and intricate processes, Luther sees "union with Christ" as simply clinging to God's promises in Christ with faith. This union is always effective whenever a conflict within arises. The lack of complexity makes it ready to be exercised at anytime, thus powerful in fighting the daily spiritual battle within: "*Here we*

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[178] *LW* 31:351.

[179] *LW* 31:351. Sins, death, and damnation can not stay in Christ forever, though. Luther followed it up with "*a mighty duel*" where Christ swallowed up death and hell in a full victory, "*for His righteousness is greater than the sins of all men, His life stronger than death, His salvation more invincible than hell.*" (*LW* 31:352).

[180] Translated from the term "*fröhlicher Wechsel*" in the German edition of this *Treatise*.

have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption".[181] Every preacher should keep this "pleasing vision" always in focus in preaching paraenesis.

Section Three The Dynamics of Faith

We have been contending that "faith alone" is not a superficial slogan devoid of its rich contents. "Faith" is no easy-believism or mere orthodoxy; but a trusting relationship to God with a firm grasp of God's promises. "Alone" does not mean faith can stand alone and do away with God's grace or Christ's redemption; it means no works of merit from us are needed for our justification. Faith alone, nothing else, honors God. Furthermore, faith alone, nothing else, is necessary for joyful victories in our spiritual life. Now, there is an additional dimension of faith: that faith is always dynamic. This is evident especially in the context of the *simul*.

1. *Faith and that which is "Extra Nos"*

According to the *simul*, the old man of flesh in us is still capable of wreaking havoc until the day we enter into glory. For the time being, we have no power in ourselves to contain it. Faith alone is our "weapon" to overcome, not in the sense that the faith inside us is powerful, but because faith alone connects us to the source of power that is "*extra nos*"—outside ourselves; as Luther says in his 1535 *Lectures on Galatians*:

> *And this is the reason why our theology is certain: it snatches us away from ourselves and places us **outside ourselves**, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works but depend on that which is **outside ourselves**, that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot de-*

[181] *LW* 31:351.

ceive.[182]

We, as human beings in our *simul* state, are not reliable in ourselves. Yet God's promise and truth in Christ is always reliable, regardless of our weakness and caprice. We have assurance of our justification and salvation because faith directs us to Christ who is outside of ourselves. This concept of *extra nos* is also elucidated in Luther's earlier sermon *Two Kinds of Righteousness* in 1519,[183] which we will expound further in the next chapter. Here in *The Freedom of a Christian,* this thought is also present, albeit often implicitly. For example, in explaining justification through faith:

> *. . . "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," . . . . When you have learned this you will know that you need Christ, . . . if you believe in him, you may through this faith become a new man in so far as your sins are forgiven and you are justified by the merits* ***of another****, namely, of Christ alone.*[184]

"*The merits of another*" means it is not our own. Faith directs us towards that which is *extra nos*, so that we are not searching deeper into ourselves. The object of our faith is *extra nos*; so as long as we honor God with faith, we are not focusing on ourselves. This is freedom from the bondage of the old man of sin inside ourselves.

The implication of this characteristic of "*extra nos*" is that our righteousness is outside ourselves. Actually our holiness and things concerning our salvation are all outside ourselves: "*…in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption*" (1 Cor. 1:30). We do not need to cultivate or build up reservoirs of holiness or anything inside ourselves. We look to

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[182] *LW* 26:387, boldface emphases mine. Luther's comment that we "*depend on that which is outside ourselves*" is about Gal. 4:6 "*⋯the Spirit of his Son* ***into our hearts****, crying, 'Abba! Father!'*". This shows clearly that being *extra nos* is not in contradiction to the fact that (the Spirit of) Christ is **in us**. The fact that Christ is in us through faith shows that we are not in essence the same as Him, and what empowers and motivates us is not our own power but Christ. This is fully compatible with the truth that everything pertaining to our salvation is *extra nos*.

[183] *LW* 31:297.

[184] *LW* 31:347, boldface emphasis mine.

Christ, who is outside ourselves, for all we need in salvation, in obedience to the Spirit and in overcoming the flesh in daily life. As Paul affirms the Corinthians, "*For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him [Christ]. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory*" (2Cor.1:20). While the "Yes" to all God's promises being in Christ is the gospel preached to us, our "Amen" through Christ to God is faith. Thus, true saving faith always directs us outwardly to God's promises in Christ.

2. *Faith is Dynamic*

We turn to Christ in faith every time a conflict is stirred up between the new man and the old. This is in essence not different from the truths discussed previously, in terms of "putting off the old man and putting on the new"; a life in which "the inner man prevails over the outward"; or "the joyful exchange between the sinner and Christ"; and similarly in the words of Paul in Romans, "*present your members as slaves to righteousness*" instead of "*as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness*" (Rom. 6:19), or live "*according to the Spirit*" versus "*according to the flesh*" (Rom. 8:5); etc. Yet here, our emphasis on *extra nos* explicitly prevents our incorrigible tendency of seeking power internally by our own works of merit, and the frustrations in unwittingly going back to those stubborn misconceptions about faith.

Since faith always directs us to rely on that which is outside ourselves, such faith must be dynamic. Faith cannot exist as an independent, static virtue or set beliefs within us. Being a hero of faith today does not guarantee the person is "full of faith" tomorrow. We always need Christ. We rely on God's eternal promises dynamically in every situation we encounter, day after day. In fact, faith occurs only when we turn to Christ. Paul wrote about this experience of faith during the time of despair in life with his coworkers in Asia (2 Cor.1:8-9):

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we ex-

perienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

The turning point happened when they were made "*rely not on ourselves but on God*". It is a vivid description of an occasion of faith. We might wonder how that could be for Paul, the great Apostle, and his coworkers including Timothy, who were seasoned missionaries by now. Hadn't they had faith since they were "converted" to Christians? Wouldn't their faith have grown mature all along the way as they embarked on the challenging journeys of missions? Why can we say it was "an occasion of faith" for them, as if they had no faith before? The answers lie in exactly what we mean by faith being "dynamic"!

In a sense, no Christian "possesses" faith as a static, inner virtue of himself, no matter whether he/she is a new believer or experienced disciple of Christ. The object, foundation, power and sources of our faith are always *extra nos* in Christ. Faith occurs, or becomes effective, only in the event when a person turns to Christ. Paul is describing such an event in his own life. And it occurred as a result that in that event he and his coworkers turned to "*rely not on ourselves but on God*". Now, there is a biblical term for this event of turning from our sinful self to Christ: "repentance". Repentance is not only for a new convert at the time he or she receives the salvation. It is the lifestyle of a Christian characterized under the *simul*. That is how Luther understands "repentance" according to the First Thesis of his famous *Ninety-Five Theses*, where he says: "*When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt 4:17), He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.*"[185] At any moment when I realize that I have become relying on myself, I always have the privilege and possibility of turning to Christ in faith, clinging to God's promises of grace, for-

[185] *LW* 31:25.

giveness and redemption right at that very moment. This is repentance indicated in 2 Corinthians 1:9. At this moment, my righteous new man has prevailed over the carnal old man. This event takes place continually as long as I live on this side of heaven. Every time I turn from self-reliance to Christ in faith, it is an experience of the gospel freedom.

Repentance, as well as the ensuing victory and freedom in life, is all dynamic throughout our lives on earth. We rely on the One outside ourselves in every occasion for justification, for forgiveness and for overcoming the old Adam of flesh in us. Justification is thus not merely an event of the past. I do not rely on a fixed fact, having happened once for all in the past, that there is already a righteous new man **in me**. Rather, I turn to Christ in time of conflicts, so the new man may prevail over the old. This faith in the One *extra nos* who is faithful and steadfast results in assurance and freedom. It liberates me from **my** works of penance, from the doubts about **my** sincerity in repentance, from **my** endeavors to deserve God's forgiveness, from the uncertainty over **my** justification and, most fundamentally, freedom from the struggles whether **my** faith is strong and steadfast enough.

3. *Faith Comes From Hearing*

Faith alone justifies; faith alone honors God; faith alone causes the new man to prevail over the old in daily life; and many, many more benefits. The crucial question remains is how do I obtain faith? Should we do something to produce faith in ourselves?

It has been established that faith occurs only when we turn to Christ. What drives us to turn to Christ? Can the law accomplish it? Is it the desperation in dismal situations of our own powerlessness? Or the shames and guilty feelings about our sins? Our own desire to be holy? As we have cautioned earlier, all these self-centered moralistic or legalistic motivations result in no faith but hypocrisy.

Human heart is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9). We should never resort to our hearts **inside us** for anything good.

In the 2 Corinthians 1 passage, what enabled Paul and his companies to turn to God instead of themselves is actually the firm promises that He is "*the God who raises the dead*". The next verse continues: "*He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again*". That is the precious gospel of Christ! They have already experienced the severity of the law: " . . . *we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death*". In circumstances like this, knowledge and doctrines that there is "*the God who raises the dead*" become dynamic, empowering gospel, creating faith and hope in Christ, which drives us to turn to Christ.

According the Bible, there is only one way to attain faith. Paul asks the questions rhetorically: "…*how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching*?" (Rom. 10:14) And answers them with the affirmative: "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*" (Rom. 10:17). That is, we cannot work out faith from within ourselves; we cannot cause faith to occur spontaneously by our own endeavors. Faith occurs only when the law and gospel, the Word of God, is preached to us. The Word of God is not written primarily to be studied, analyzed or systematized. It is to be proclaimed and preached, to create faith in us, to save us and empower us to over-come the old Adam and set us free. Faith comes only from hearing the Word of God preached to us. Thus, preaching is never adequate to merely offer information about the Bible, or even about Christ. Far worse is to preach only law to demand conformity. Luther thus contends strongly:

> . . . *it is not enough or in any sense Christian to preach the works, life, and*

> *words of Christ as historical facts, as if the knowledge of these would suffice for the conduct of life. . . . Far less is it sufficient or Christian to say nothing at all about Christ and to teach instead the laws of men and the decrees of the fathers*.[186]

This is how important gospel preaching is! The purpose of preaching must be encouraging and promoting faith in Christ. Wrong purposes, such as political motivations to incite angers against the Jews (at Luther's time), are "*childish and effeminate nonsense*".[187] Christ must be preached according to His glorious gospel, so that the preaching generates faith in the listeners in a personal way:

> *. . . ought Christ to be preached to the end that* ***faith in Him may be established*** *that He may* not only be Christ, *but be* ***Christ for you and me****, and that what is said of Him and is denoted in His name may be effectual in us.*[188]

Furthermore, the substance of preaching must be the holistic gospel of Christ, and the expected results must be the creation of faith that brings freedom to the listeners:

> *Such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept him. This is done when that Christian liberty which He bestows is rightly taught . . .*[189]

4. *Preaching is Dynamic*

Back to the beginning of *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther's insistence on preaching Christ is now more coherent to us:

> *To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching. Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God.*[190]

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[186] *LW* 31:357.

[187] *Ibid*., boldface emphases mine.

[188] *Ibid*.

[189] *Ibid*.

[190] *LW* 31:346.

All these effects of faith are dynamic. The preaching of the gospel is never meant to be mere instructions on some static facts about Christ. The point is that we all need the gospel to be preached to us as often as possible, particularly when there is a spiritual battle within. And it must be kept in mind that this battle is an ongoing struggle throughout the whole earthly existence of a Christian. Thus we have to insist with Luther on the priority of the gospel and the constant necessity for paraenesis in Christian life. There is a saying attributed to Luther: "*We need to hear the gospel every day, because we forget it everyday*."[191] And this is the reason for paraenesis: the Word of God, the gospel, must be applied to and practiced in our lives continually, in various ways as encouragements, exhortations, admonitions, instructions or comforts.

Not only so, Luther would often entreat us to preach the gospel to ourselves.[192] For example, in the same Galatians Commentary,

> *Let everyone **accustom himself**. . . . . so that he can say: "I know that I have been accepted and that I have the Holy Spirit, not on account of my worthiness or virtue but on account of Christ, who subjected Himself to the Law on our account and took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). In Him I believe. If I am a sinner, and if I err, He is righteous and cannot err.*[193]

More candidly, in his 1531 letter of counsel to Barbara Lisskirchen, who was troubled by the question whether she was among one of the elect, Luther wrote:

> *The highest of all God's commands is this, that we **ever hold up before our***

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[191] Although this statement cannot be found among (the English translations of) *Luther's Works*, it is definitely what Luther would say about preaching paraenesis. It is probably a paraphrase of his idea, frequently appears in his teachings. For example, in his 1535 Commentary on the Galatians, "*[the righteousness of faith] must always be taught and continually exercised* "(*LW* 26: 5), and "*It is, therefore, extremely necessary that we come to know this doctrine [the Gospel] well and constantly inculcate it*" (LW 26:91).

[192] See, for example, Bob Kellemen, *Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017), Chapter 5.

[193] *LW* 26:397, boldface emphases mine.

> ***eyes*** *the image of his dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He must* ***daily*** *be to our hearts the perfect mirror, in which we behold how much God loves us and how well, in his infinite goodness, as a faithful God, he has grandly cared for us in that he gave his dear Son for us. Do not let this mirror and throne of grace be torn away from before your eyes.*[194]

This advice of constantly preaching the gospel to oneself is not Luther's innovation, but is solidly based on biblical truths. There is obviously an allusion to 2 Corinthians 3:18,

> *. . . And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

The subtlety in this Scriptural verse is in "*beholding the glory of the Lord*". The verb for "behold", κατοπτρίζο, is an interesting word which could mean "*show in a mirror, reflect*"[195]. The middle voice κατοπτρίζομαι usually means "look at something in a mirror"[196], thus the NASB rendering of the participle here "***beholding as in a mirror*** *the glory of the Lord . . . ".*[197] Usually I see in the mirror my own image. Yet when the gospel is preached, even by myself to myself, the self-centered "veil" (2 Cor. 3:16) which obstruct me from turning to the Lord is removed, and what I see in the mirror is no longer my own image, but the glory of the Lord; that is, the image of Christ.[198] The more I behold His image, the more I become like Him; ". . . *are being*

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[194] Theodore G. Tappert, ed. *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent Canada College Publishing, 2003), 116, boldface emphases mine.

[195] Balz and Schneider, *EDNT* Vol.2, 274-275.

[196] *Ibid.*, 274. "That κατοπτρίζομαι is not to be understood in the refined sense of behold . . . is required by the phrase τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα [the same image]: beholding Yahweh's glory in the mirror/ image . . . of Christ (cf.4:4, 6) stands in the service . . . of the transformation produced by the Spirit 'into the same image' . . .", ibid., 275.

[197] Many other translations, such as KJV, RSV and Chinese Union version all render this phrase in similar ways "as in a mirror". The NET and the New Chinese Translation also add a footnote indicating this connotation.

[198] See Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, TNTC vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 100-101. Also Murray J. Harris, *2 Corinthians*, The Expositir's Bible Commentary vol. 10 (Grand Rapids,

transformed into the same image . . . from glory to glory", in a wonderful transformation I can never create by myself.

This is the power of gospel preaching, always produce faith in us from *extra nos*, even it is preached by oneself to oneself. This is definitely an important form of paraenesis—to apply the gospel truth to oneself. Actually, when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, what he and his team did was just that: preaching the gospel to themselves. Even though they "*felt that we had received the sentence of death"*, instead of desperately struggling to somehow save themselves with their own resources, they turned to God; because they proclaimed the truth that He "*who raises the dead*" was He who *". . . delivered us . . . , will deliver us. . . will deliver us again*". This message of ever-invigorating gospel empowered them, that Paul the great Apostle and his team of seasoned missionaries could repent of their unwitting self-reliance, turn and were made "*rely not on ourselves but on God*" (2 Cor. 1:9-10). That is surely the dynamical preaching of the gospel.

There is a popular misconception that we preach the gospel only to unbelievers, and preach sanctifications to Christians. Thus we may categorize sermons into "gospel (evangelistic) sermons" and "spiritual deepening" ones. A church may hold a "gospel Sunday" and preaches the "gospel"; while on other Sundays it preaches "Christian life". Such artificial dichotomy confuses faith; in fact it confuses almost everything concerning our salvation, treating repentance, faith and justification as items in their respective static states. It deprives the living Word of God of the dynamic gospel, and preaching becomes at best an appeal for believing, powerless in setting people free.

The point being made, we may use a more colloquial expression for "being dynamic". Say, the gospel is refreshing every time it is preached to us throughout our

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MI: Zondervan, 1987), 338-339.

whole life on earth. It may sound a tedious process without an end of accomplishment in sight. Yet that is only because we are too accustomed to relying on ourselves. Our assurance is on our own maturity or achievements. In fact this dynamic nature of the gospel is the most certain assurance and a great comfort to us: we never have to worry about "What if someday I become not steadfast? Could I fall out of God's favor and salvation because I lost faith?" or uncertainties like that. Christ is faithful yesterday, today and forever. God's promises in Christ are steadfast forever. As long as the Word of God is preached to us, as long as we have ears to listen, we are assured that we will remain God's justified always living by faith. This is true Christian liberty.

When Luther is drawing to a close his elucidation on faith, and concludes that a Christian is a most free lord of all, he could not help but exclaim with joy:

> *What man is there whose heart, upon hearing these things, will not rejoice to its depth, and when receiving such comfort will not grow tender so that he will love Christ as he never could by means of any laws or works?*[199]

It is faith, brought about by the gospel and preached to the heart, that results in the deep joy, comfort and love for Christ. It is this faith that empowers us to overcome in our daily spiritual struggles:

> *So the heart learns to scoff at death and sin and to say with the Apostle, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? . . . But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ". . . Death is swallowed up not only in the victory of Christ but also by our victory, because through faith his victory has become ours and in that faith we also are conquerors*.[200]

It is this victory, this faith and this freedom to scoff at death that we must always preach in paraenesis.

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[199] *LW* 31:357.

[200] *LW* 31:358.

5. *Revisiting the Concept of the "Simul"*

With the understanding of the dynamic nature of faith and preaching, this is the appropriate juncture to clarify some confusion concerning the concept of the *simul*. The terms "new man" and "old man" are direct translations from biblical language.[201] Yet as we explained earlier, they are not to be understood strictly literally. Just like that when Paul cries "Who will deliver me from this body of death", he does not mean there is a separate dead physical body attached to him. Similarly, the *simul*, of course, does not mean two individual physical beings existing in a Christian. Neither does it mean a dichotomy between physical and spiritual aspects of a Christian. It describes two distinct "states" of the human nature of a Christian.[202] These two conditions exist in the same person during his life on earth, which gives rise to the use of the adverb "*simul*taneously". Actually these two conditions are always mutually exclusive. When the Christian turns in faith to Christ, he is 100% righteous. When he turns away from Christ, he is totally corrupted in his own carnal self. The determining factor is faith.

As we have argued above, our righteousness, holiness (sanctification), redemption… are all "*extra nos*", outside of ourselves in Christ. "Christ in me" does not mean I "possess" perfect righteousness independently in and of my own being, but I can rely on Him whenever I need righteousness, or anything concerning my salvation and spiritual life. Based on God's Word of promise, I know I can always turn to Him when I become weak, tempted or in despair. This is the nature of faith—a dynamic relationship with God in Christ. Apart from Christ—the ultimate object of my faith,

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[201] The biblical terms old man (τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον) and the new man (τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον) are found in, e.g., Eph. 4:22-24, Rom. 6:6, Col. 3:9ff, etc. The new man is also identified with the inner man (τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον) in Rom.7:22.

[202] Cf. Cwirla, "*On Being Simul—Scriptural Elucidations and Pastoral Applications*", 7.

I do not have any faith in myself that is genuinely saving.

It must be emphasized, however, that this dynamism does not by any means suggest an unstable, unpredictable spiritual condition or an uncertain destiny. The new man exists as God's new creation in Christ, while the old man is in Adam and is destined to perish with this life on earth. In the meanwhile, God's steadfast promises always produce faith in me whenever I need it. That is the "dynamic assurance" of a Christian on earth. "*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*" (Col. 3:3) is our assurance at any time. This "hidden" new life stays intact through all trials and attacks, throughout the whole span of my time here on earth, even I fail miserably at times. After all, my assurance never rests in me, but in Christ alone "*who is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him....*" (Heb. 7:25) This assurance directs my life from a self-centered, inward focus to an upward one toward Christ. This shift of life's focus is a great freedom.

Chapter Five　Good Works and Paraenesis

Section One　Good Works and the *Simul*

1. *A Call for a Solid Theology on Good Works*

The ultimate aim of this study is about preaching paraenesis, which is inseparable from the application of the truths preached. It inevitably involves actions, particularly good works we are to do. Yet it might appear so far that we have argued for "faith alone" to the exclusion of all works, as it has often been reflected in Luther's strong words, like these below when he remarks on faith alone that enables the soul to cling to the promises of God:

> *From what has been said it is easy to see from what source faith derives such great power and why a good work or all good works together cannot equal it. No good work can rely upon the Word of God or live in the soul, for faith alone and the Word of God rule in the soul*.[203]

It might have made an impression that we devalue any works, even good works commanded in the Scripture. Our strong position on faith alone could even be misread unto a false notion that good works are to be despised. Nothing, of course, can be further from the truth. Luther did anticipate such misunderstandings. To the hypothetical objection that, if faith is alone sufficient unto righteousness, " . . . *why then are good works commanded [in the Scripture]? We will take our ease and do no works* . . . "; Luther replies bluntly: "*not so, you wicked men, not so*".[204] And concerning good works, he contends: "*We do not . . . reject good works; on the contrary,*

[203] *LW* 31:349.

[204] *LW* 31:358.

we cherish and teach them as much as possible."[205]

Do we?

Admittedly, anyone can pay lip service to the significance of good works. Therefore **we need a sturdy theology on good works** to back up the claim that we "*cherish and teach them as much as possible*". That is what Luther does in the second half of *The Freedom of a Christian*. This is the most brilliant part of this *treatise*. Luther is so eloquent and articulate that there is often no better way to present the ideas than directly quoting him. That is what we will do frequently in the following discussions.

2. *Good Works in the Context of the "Simul"*

It goes back to the two foundational propositions in the beginning of the *treatise*: that a Christian is both "*a perfectly free lord of all*" and "*a perfectly dutiful servant of all*".[206] Works are indeed unnecessary "*if we were wholly inner and perfectly spiritual men*", who are purely free lords of all. But for the present stage, a Christian is at the same time "*the servant of all and made subject to all*" as he " . . . *remains in this mortal life on earth."* There is a clearly recognizable reference to the doctrine of the *simul*: "*insofar as he is free he does no works, but insofar as he is a servant he does all kinds of works*."[207] Therefore, *"In this life he must control his own body and have dealings with men.* ***Here the works begin***".[208] Thus works have to do with the fact that our existence is still "in this life", and in matters of controlling the body and having dealings with others, the anthropological context of the *simul* does apply.[209]

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[205] *LW* 31:363.

[206] *LW* 31:344.

[207] *LW* 31: 358.

[208] *Ibid*., boldface emphasis mine.

[209] As previously mentioned in footnote 113 on p. 47, Luther did not develop "the doctrine of the

Operating in this context of the *simul*, Luther builds a plain yet robust theology on good works. It treats both issues of "*control[ling] his own body*" and "*have[ing] dealings with men*" on a solid foundation grounded on the gospel freedom. Based on this theology, we can preach good works boldly without worrying about behaviorism, legalism or moralism. Actually it becomes a mandate to preach them as the necessary consequence and extension of the gospel preached. This is of crucial significance in our discussions on paraenesis preaching, and will be explicated in the following Sections.

Section Two Faith Alone and Good Works

1. *Faith and Good Works in General*

Good works, especially those commanded in the Scripture, are good by nature. But the motives they are done by sinful human beings might not be good at all. That is Luther's point of caution. Fundamental to Luther's theology of good works is the central role of faith. It is implied in the following simple statement: *"Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works."*[210] What makes a man "good"—that is, righteous? Nothing but faith! Faith alone justifies. To make his point, Luther even uses the hyperbolic contrast "*evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works*". This could even be misunderstood, if taken out of context, as saying "Do evil as you please, since it won't make you wicked anyway". Thus Luther follows it up with a host of illustrations/analogies. Among them,

> *A bishop, when he consecrates a church, confirms children, or performs some other duty belonging to his office, is not made a bishop by these works.*

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simul" *per se* here in this *treatise*. His uses of the terms "the new/inner/spiritual man", the soul, and "the old/outward/carnal man are sometimes not rigorously qualified. Nevertheless, the concept is there and serves as the crucial context for his discussions on good works.

[210] *LW* 31:361.

Indeed, if he had not first been made a bishop, none of these works would be valid.[211]

In fact, it would be extremely stupid to act like a bishop and perform a bishop's duties if I am not one. Luther says that is how foolish it is when people try to do good works without a righteous life.

He also cites Christ's saying "*A good tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit [Matt. 7:18]*":

> *It is clear that the fruits do not bear the tree and that the tree does not grow on the fruits, also that, on the contrary, the trees bear the fruits and the fruits grow on the trees. As it is necessary, therefore, that the trees exist before their fruits and the fruits do not make trees either good or bad, but rather as the trees are, so are the fruits they bear; so a man must first be good or wicked before he does a good or wicked work, and his works do not make him good or wicked, but he himself makes his works either good or wicked.*

The plain truth Luther is getting at is clear: **Don't even try to do good works unless you are a good man first**. Yet how can we be good? **This is where faith comes into play**.

> *[As Christ says] Either **make the tree good, and its fruit good**; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad [Matt. 12:33]. . . as if he (Christ) would say, "Let him who wishes to have good fruit begin by planting a good tree." So let him who wishes to do good works **begin not with the doing of works, but with believing**, which makes the person good, for nothing makes a man good except faith, or evil except unbelief.*[212]

All these arguments are aiming at the conclusion that faith, and faith alone, is the cause and fountain of all good works: "*as faith makes a man a believer and righteous, so faith does good works*."[213] Faith does good works! Good works are effects, or results, of a justified life through faith. They should never be taken as the cause or

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[211] *LW* 31:360.

[212] *LW* 31:362, boldface emphases mine.

[213] *LW* 31:361.

means to make a person good; i.e., to justify him.

2. *The Deception on the Surface*

This, at first glance, is but a mere reiteration of the doctrine of justification through faith from a different angle. Yet this perspective is **of special significance when good works are involved**. Most Christians would agree that our justification is through faith alone, without works of merits. That is clear when we focus on the narrowly defined doctrine of justification. But when dealing with issues involving good works, it is strangely common that we overlook, forget or completely ignore who we are—sinners justified through faith alone. We disregard the *simul* and endeavor to do righteous deeds out of the passions of the flesh, as if we were righteous in ourselves. We make demands on others to do good—parents on children, teachers on pupils and sure enough, preachers on listeners, actually Christians on and among themselves; as if they could actually be made righteous if only they could perform the good works demanded of them. Faith becomes a remote issue that is irrelevant here.

Luther is fully aware of this irresistible tendency to err among Christians; even those who uphold the right doctrine of justification by faith. This is because it appears on the surface that good works do seem to have some effect in making a person good. Such superficial observation only enhances the deceptiveness of work-righteousness:

> *It is indeed true that in the sight of men a man is made good or evil by his works; but this being made good or evil only means that the man who is good or evil is pointed out and known as such, as Christ says in Matt. 7[:20], "Thus you will know them by their fruits."*[214]

"*By their fruits*"—what is exhibited externally does not change or reform, but merely exposes, what it is internally.

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[214] *LW* 31:362.

Unfortunately, even this saying of Christ is often taken superficially and thus misused for the exact opposite purpose it is intended. It is commonly taught and applied in the manner to compel Christians to act up and behave themselves, as if they might in so doing show good witnesses to the outside world. Luther warns against such deceptions harshly:

> *All this **remains on the surface**, however, and very many have been deceived by this outward appearance and have presumed to write and teach concerning good works by which we may be justified without even mentioning faith. They go their way, always being deceived and deceiving [II Tim. 3:13], progressing, indeed, but into a worse state, blind leaders of the blind, wearying themselves with many works and still never attaining to true righteousness [Matt. 15:14].*[215]

So, he maintains:

> *Whoever, therefore, does not wish to go astray with those blind men must **look beyond works**, and beyond laws and doctrines about works.*[216]

That is, look beyond the surface into the core: faith. Faith alone does the good works! This is the criterion to judge all teachings and practices about good works:

> *From this it is easy to know how far good works are to be rejected or not, and by what standard all the teachings of men concerning works are to be interpreted.*[217]

3. *When Will Good Works No Longer Be Good*

The phrase "*to know how far good works are to be rejected*" seems arrogant. Good works are commanded in the Scripture. Shouldn't they be intrinsically good? Yes, of course. But the issue is what motivates and drives sinful human-beings like us to do them. Could there be evils hidden behind works which seem to be good ex-

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[215] *Ibid*., boldface emphasis mine.

[216] *Ibid*., boldface emphasis mine.

[217] *LW* 31:363.

ternally? Certainly. Thus the appropriate question to ask should be "Under what circumstances are good works no longer good?" To this question Luther answers directly:

> *If works are sought after as a means to righteousness , are burdened with this **perverse leviathan**, and are done under the false impression that through them one is justified, they are made necessary and freedom and faith are destroyed; and this addition to them makes them no longer good but truly damnable works*.[218]

This is clear. You cannot transpose the root and fruits and still call it a tree. If works are in any sense made a necessity for justification, faith would be nullified and freedom would be lost.

What Luther did not say explicitly is unmistakable: "When the good news gives way to good works, there is nothing good left." Works are the necessary "consequences", not "cause", of a righteous life. When I try to do "good" works without faith, I am doing them apart from God. It is an arrogant boast that "I am good" without God. The motivation is self-exaltation. The driving force is derived from pride and greed for vain glory. The more works I do, the more arrogant and hypocritical I become. Thus no matter what good essence there is in these works, they become "damnable" in my life.

4. *A Fierce Fight Against the "Perverse Leviathan"*

As we have come this far, we may think that we have gotten Luther's point. He's been persuasive. We agree with him fully. We are free to, and ought to, preach good works as much as we can; as long as we do not attach to them the "*godless addition*",[219] which is a hidden motivation to seek justification through them. This is certainly the proper understanding. It is based on this understanding Luther

[218] *Ibid*., boldface emphasis mine.

[219] *Ibid*.

in the first place claims "*we cherish and teach them (good works) as much as possible*".

But Luther is not done with this subject yet. He is too concerned about the deceptiveness of this "*godless addition*" which he calls the "*perverse leviathan*".[220] He knows too well that people would still fall for it even they have been cautioned previously. He tries every bit of his vigor to expose the real ugly look of this perverse leviathan. This deceptive idea that good works somehow justify the doer makes our works appear good outwardly, while we the doers have already turned damnable internally! And unless we consciously fight it every time with faith that connects us to the One *extra nos*, we don't stand a chance in our own power.

We could almost hear Luther yelling at the top of his lungs the following words, trying to save as many people as he could:

> *They deceive men and lead them to deceive one another like ravening wolves in sheep's clothing [Matt. 7:15]. But this leviathan, or perverse notion concerning works, is unconquerable where sincere faith is wanting. Those work-saints cannot get rid of it unless faith, its destroyer, comes and rules in their hearts. Nature of itself cannot drive it out or even recognize it, but rather regards it as a mark of the most holy will. If the influence of custom is added and confirms this perverseness of nature, as wicked teachers have caused it to do, it becomes an incurable evil and leads astray and destroys countless men beyond all hope of restoration. Therefore, although it is good to preach and write about penitence, confession, and satisfaction, our teaching is unquestionably deceitful and diabolical if we stop with that and do not go on to teach about faith.*[221]

In today's language, it would sound like this: "This disease (work righteousness) of deceitfulness is extremely malicious and highly contagious! Our natural immune system cannot resist it at all! Rather, we'd feel good at first when infected! The cultural and religious environment is just right for super spreaders to go rampant.

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[220] *Ibid*.

[221] *LW* 31:364.

There is a pandemic of this deadly plague! Death rate, if not properly treated in time at the earliest stage, is simply 100%!"

And thankfully, there is a cure. "The only medicine for a sure cure is faith! Take the medicine right into your heart whenever there is any doubt of infection! Do it as soon as, and as often as, possible before it becomes too late!"

5. *Preaching that Arouses Faith*

Now, how do we obtain faith, this powerful cure for the deadly plague? How can faith, the destroyer of that perverse leviathan, come into being and rule in our hearts? This question leads us back to the law-gospel paradigm.

> *We must bring forth the voice of the law that men may be made to fear and come to a knowledge of their sins . . . But we must not stop with that . . . we must also preach the word of grace and the promise of forgiveness* ***by which faith is taught and aroused***.[222]

Luther's contemporary "*preachers of repentance and grace*"[223] never grasped this crucial distinction as well as the respective purposes of law and gospel. Their preaching, therefore, did not help the listeners to go to the root and source of repentance and grace. As we emphasize that "*faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ*" (Rom. 10:17), it is appropriate at this point to insist again that this "preaching of Christ" must be done with a clear vision of the crucial law-gospel distinction, and the gospel, the divine promises that forgive and comfort, is always the last word even in the context of preaching good works.[224] Actually, the gospel must be the driving force that empowers the listeners to act and do the good works preached. We must and only preach good works as the effects

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[222] *Ibid.,* boldface emphases mine.

[223] *Ibid.*

[224] *Ibid.*

and consequences of a life justified through faith. When "*faith is taught and aroused*", good works follow. Instead of rules, standards or requirements, the focus of our preaching remains on the gospel that comforts and arouses faith. Preaching good works the right way does not at all suggest coercing people to conform to moral rules and standards. It does not somehow, as some suppose, hinder the gospel freedom. If anything, it liberates people to do good works freely and voluntarily. This is the heart of biblical paraenesis.

Section Three Works to Discipline Oneself

1. *Personal Disciplines*

The previous Section deals with good works in general. Now two special cases require separate treatments. We have previously quoted Luther on good works in the context of the "*simul*", that the inner man does no works yet the outward man does: *"In this life he must control his own body and have dealings with men. Here the works begin.*"[225] Here, the good works a Christian does are categorized into two groups: those which "*control one's own body*"; and those which "*have dealings with others*". We will look into the first group first.

As a Christian remains in this mortal life on earth, there are basic works to keep life going. As long as they are not relied upon for our righteousness, Luther's attitude toward these works is positive:

> *Our faith in Christ does not free us from works but from false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works . . . although works neither can nor ought to be wanting; just as we cannot be without food and drink and all the works of this mortal body, yet our righteousness is not in them, but in faith; and yet those works of the body are not to be despised or neglected on that account. In this world we are bound by the*

[225] *LW* 31:358.

needs of our bodily life, but we are not righteous because of them.[226]

More subtle are works one does to "*control (or 'train', according to Wengert's translation*[227]*) his own body*". Any work he does which helps to subject his flesh under the Spirit is potentially a good work. Whatever he can do to "*put off the old man*" and "*put on the new man*", to win the spiritual struggle within, belongs to this category. This is, of course, under the condition that no "*godless addition*" is attached to it. Luther briefly mentioned some possible good works which control one's own body:

> *. . . here he must indeed take care to discipline his body by fastings, watchings, labors, and other reasonable discipline and to subject it to the Spirit so that it will obey and conform to the inner man and faith and not revolt against faith and hinder the inner man, as it is the nature of the body to do if it is not held in check.*[228]

2. *Specific Purpose and Minimum Amount*

As insisted previously, these works are considered "good" only if an understanding is held fast that these very works do not serve as justification for himself before God. Other than that, we might naturally suppose that since they are good, the more of them the better it is for us. That is not true. The purpose of these works is very specific and restricted:

> *We must, however, realize that these works reduce the body to subjection and purify it of its evil lusts, and our* ***whole purpose*** *is to be directed* ***only*** *toward the driving out of lusts.*[229]

That is the only purpose. Luther cautions us keenly that, the amount of such

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[226] *LW* 31:373.

[227] Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther*, translated by Timothy Wengert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016) Kindle location.

[228] *LW* 31:359.

[229] *Ibid*., boldface emphases mine.

kind of good works should be kept to a minimum! They are initiated by the inner man to contain the lusts of the outward man:

> *Since by faith the soul is cleansed and made to love God, it desires that all things, and especially its own body, shall be purified so that all things may join with it in loving and praising God. Hence a man cannot be idle, for the need of his body drives him and he is compelled to do many good works to reduce it to subjection.*[230]

That is, to subject the flesh to the Spirit when any signs of lustful desires are detected in daily living. And that is its purpose, nothing else. Beyond that purpose they are not useful.[231]

> *In this way everyone will easily be able to learn for himself the limit and discretion, . . . for he will fast, watch, and labor as much as he finds sufficient to repress the lasciviousness and lust of his body.*[232]

As a matter of fact, an excess of them indicates an unconscious return to work-righteous mentality and is harmful!

> *But those who presume to be justified by works do not regard the mortifying of the lusts, but only the works themselves, and think that if only they have done as many and as great works as are possible, they have done well and have become righteous.*

Yet this kind of merit mentality not only blinds them to God's justifying grace in Christ, it preoccupies them with self-absorption of their own works; ultimately exhausts their energy and renders their natural strength useless. Such presumptuous mentality is "*the height of folly and utter ignorance of Christian life and faith*".[233]

After all, preaching on works of self-disciplines does serve the purpose of sub-

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[230] *Ibid*.

[231] Actually there is one more possible purpose one does works to control his own body, which is to serve his neighbor. This will be discussed in the next Section.

[232] *LW* 31:360.

[233] *LW* 31:360.

jecting the flesh to the Spirit, if it is done on the basis of faith. It deserves a place in paraenesis. Yet any excess preoccupation in this respect is an indication of errors toward work-righteousness and merits. It must be sternly cautioned against. This caution deserves special attention and thus is elaborated next.

3. *Deliberate Brevity to Prevent Preoccupation*

The caution above can be further confirmed by noting that other than the brief discussion above, Luther says very little about works a Christian does for his own spirituality. In fact the only few occasions he mentions this topic in this *treatise* are during his elaboration on good works in general in relation to faith, discussed in the previous section.[234] He mentions spiritual disciplines such as fasting, watching and laboring only in passing. He never stops to treat them in any details. This could seem to be odd to non-Lutherans because subjects like mortification of lusts are major themes in most Christian churches of both Catholic and Protestant camps. They are considered the essential part of sanctification, placed among the most important spiritual disciplines in many major church traditions.

Does this fact imply that Luther is negligent on this subject? Does this arrangement expose Luther's lack of understanding or experience of it? Does it confirm the popular criticism that Lutheran theology is "strong in justification and weak on sanctification"? This is indeed a very popular view held by most Protestant church traditions. The well-reviewed Counterpoints series book "*Five Views on Sanctification*" does not even include a "Lutheran view" at all.[235] But no, nothing

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[234] At the close of his discussions on good works and faith, Luther writes: "*Let this suffice concerning works in general and at the same time concerning the works which a Christian does for himself*", as if "*the works a Christian does for himself*" are merely incidental to the main discussion. See *LW* 31:364.

[235] Melvin E. Dieter et al., *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) This book includes chapters on the Wesleyan, the Reformed, the Pentecostal, the Keswick and the Dispensational perspectives of sanctification, but no mention is made about the Lutheran perspective at all. See also Ed Schroeder, "Are Lutherans Really 'Strong on Justification,' but 'Weak on Sanctification?'"

could be further from the truth! Regardless of the diversity of forms and practices, the various spiritual discipline methods of Protestants are, at the end of the day, all rooted in the old Church traditions which are epitomized in the medieval monasticism. The Reformation might have moved the dividing line from the clergy/laity to believers/non-believers. Justification and assurance might have received more emphases. Yet these man-made methods and techniques for spiritual disciplines are never new.[236] Luther had been a very strict and devout friar of the Augustinian order. Be it theological training or personal practices and experiences, he was way better equipped in these disciplines than most his contemporary reformers and later Protestant thinkers. Here, it would have been one of his best opportunities to show off what he had at his fingertips. Yet he deliberately avoided treating the subject any further than necessary. Why did he?

These methods, not specifically detailed in the Scripture, should not be mystic in any sense or require any sophisticated philosophically or metaphysically theories. Luther obviously did not see the worth of teaching them albeit he had mastered so many of them. If anything, his succinct treatment shows a profound insight concerning Christian spirituality: that these works for training ourselves are highly specific in purpose, and must be restricted within that purpose, as we have mentioned a little earlier.

Without this crucial insight, there would be endless spiritual quests in this regard according to our self-centered disposition. Christians would thus be preoccupied all

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January 13, 2005 [Online], Available: https://crossings.org/are-lutherans-really-strong-on-justification-but-weak-on-sanctification/ (accessed mar.11, 2020).

[236] For example, it is said that the Puritans "*sought to graft patristic and medieval spirituality onto the Reformation base of justification by faith.*" Richard F. Lovelace, "Evangelical Spirituality," in Kenneth J.Collins, *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2000), 219.

the time and bury themselves in perpetual pursuits trying to attain the impossible perfection on this side of eternity. They could always invent new ways to prolong such unsuccessful activities. Their spiritual energy would be mostly consumed on navel-gazing fruit counts which drive them deeper into self-conscious endeavors. By and by they would be unknowingly deprived of the gospel freedom and submitted themselves again to a yoke of slavery. Such tendencies can always be detected in many popular teachings on spiritual disciplines for sanctification, even today. Thus, Luther deliberately limits his discussions on this subject of works to discipline one-self.

It is probably worthwhile to mention here that "self-control" is only one of the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). All the other eight aspects are relational. That is, they all have something to do with loving one's neighbor. Although this thought is only by association of ideas, and it does not necessarily mean the relative importance (or the lack of it) of the characteristics within the fruit of the Spirit, it is still interesting to note this fact. In all, it is safe for us to conclude that the lack of intricate embellishment on the subject of self-discipline by Luther is deliberate. It is the strength, not weakness, of Luther's grasp of the issues involved. The implications to our paraenesis preaching are obvious, then. We can, and should, preach good works for self-disciplines properly as one type of applications of our sermons; yet the purpose has to be directing listeners to Christ instead of becoming self-absorbed, and the proportion of such applications in our preaching must be limited to give priority to those of loving God and loving our neighbor.

Section Four The Two Kinds of Righteousness

1. *An Outward Focus*

While refusing to teach details about works to control/train one's own body, Luther is rather passionate about the other group of good works which "*have dealings with others*". He is far more enthusiastic in directing Christians to this totally different pursuit of righteousness and good works, one that is completely outward focused: "*Lastly, we shall also speak of the things which he does toward his neighbor*".[237] That is, good works done in love to serve one's neighbor. He goes to great lengths to teach it.

> *A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather, he lives only for others and not for himself . . . He cannot ever in this life be idle and without works toward his neighbors . . .* [238]

This is Luther's radical interpretation of "loving your neighbor as yourself". While our flesh is incorrigibly self-centered and self-absorbing, Luther shows us that God's "*divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3). Nothing good for us is spared from us. This gospel liberates us from a self-seeking focus and turns our focus outwardly to love our neighbor. Luther's teachings here are rooted in a vital insight on the doctrine of justification known today as the "Two Kinds of Righteousness", as explicated below.

2. *The Two Kinds of Righteousness*

More than a year earlier in 1519, Luther delivered a sermon based on Philippians 2:5–7, where he deals with the ethical questions of good works by applying the doc-

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[237] *LW* 31:364.

[238] *LW* 31:364-5.

trine of justification to everyday living[239] "*by effectively differentiating between"* two distinct kinds of righteousness: the first is *"Christ's righteousness by means of which he justifies, sanctifies, and redeems"*; and the second, *"the righteousness of a believing Christian which is made possible by the righteousness of Christ"*.[240] The first righteousness is "*alien righteousness*", as it is done by Christ outside of (alien to) us. The second is "*proper righteousness*", as it is properly **our** righteousness by which **we work** righteously. With this second (proper) righteousness, life is "*spent profitably*" in these three aspects: in crucifying the old self, in loving neighbor, and in fearing God.[241] All these works are actively done by us and they are good, yet none of them cause our justification before God; which is solely accomplished by the first kind righteousness, the righteousness of Christ from *extra nos*—outside of us, received only passively.

Luther further developed (often implicitly, though) this paradigm of the Two Kinds of Righteousness in his 1535 Lectures on Galatians,[242] with deeper thrusts from and back into his major theological frameworks, including the "*simul iustus et peccator*", the functions of law and gospel, life of repentance and forgiveness, and the theology of the cross. The "first kind righteousness" is identified there as "passive righteousness" because Christians receive it passively without any works. The

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[239] Ethical questions are commonly treated as issues of sanctification. Yet in many cases, Luther could discern the root problems to be in justification.

[240] *Introduction* to the Sermon on *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1519), *LW* 31: 295. Actually Luther began to contemplate about this idea even earlier than 1518, in his early lectures on Romans. (See, e.g., *LW* 25:136-7). But this sermon of 1519 is of defining relevance on this concept.

[241] *LW* 31: 298. Note that what Luther means by "fearing God" here is our "righteousness response" to Christ's righteousness that has justified us. We receive the latter passively, yet act on the former (fearing God) actively. Both have to do with our relationship with God, yet the natures, directions and functions are widely different. Our fear of God, being a result of His justifying righteousness in our lives, cannot be counted on for our justification before God. See footnote 245 below for the possible confusion in the two-dimensional model of Kolb et al.

[242] *LW* 26 and 27.

"second kind", correspondingly, is called "active righteousness" there and includes more aspects of works they actively do.

Contemporary scholars have developed this idea of Two Kinds of Righteousness with further elucidations. Kolb and colleagues proposed that, as righteousness is often defined with respect to relationship, there exist two kinds of relationships for a human being—one with God his Creator, and the other with the creation, particularly his/her fellow human beings.[243] Before God (*coram Deo*) we are entirely passive; and so is our righteousness on which our justification relies. On the other hand and at the same time, our righteousness in the world before our fellow creatures (*coram mundo*) is active. It exists in our actively carrying out our God-ordained tasks (vocations) within our walks of life, for the good of the creation.[244] One must not confuse these two relationships. For example, someone having broken civil laws cannot claim that there is "*no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1). The Scripture is true and does apply to his life, yet specifically before God. Christ's righteousness covers his sins *coram deo*, not *coram mundo*. He still has to subject to civil laws in the world (*coram mundo*). On the other hand, his good works, no matter how laudable *coram mundo*, is like filthy rags *coram Deo* (Is. 64:6), utterly unworthy of his own justification for eternal life.[245]

What is taught here seems to be essentially the fundamental truths of justification

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[243] R. Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness: Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1999): 449-466; C. P. Arand and J. Biermann, "Why the Two Kinds of Righteousness?" *Concordia Journal*, Vol.33, no.2 (April 2007): 116-135. See also R. Kolb and C. P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids, MI : Baker, 2008) and R. Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[244] Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, 29.

[245] This "two-dimensional" (vertical and horizontal) model, however, does not seem to accommodate well with our active righteousness in fearing God. It tends to reduce human relationship with God to a uni-directional manner, only from God for our justification. See also footnote 241.

by grace alone through faith alone which we have already explicated in earlier Chapters. Yet the distinction made here is necessary **when good works are involved**. It recounts the essential doctrines of justification with far greater clarity. A Christian lives simultaneously *coram Deo* and *coram mundo*. He is justified passively before God; while he pursues righteousness actively toward his neighbor by his own good works in this world. This distinction is extremely helpful, as Christians on their spiritual journey will inescapably be perplexed often by a dilemma: that they are reckoned fully righteous without any works of their own, yet at the same time they are mandated to do righteous works. Their struggles for a balance in the middle avail nothing but wrecking both ends. Here Luther identifies with clarity the sticking point of all the confusions: **those are actually two different kinds of righteousness!**

The first kind, by which a Christian is made righteous, is alien to his life and works. It is "*the righteousness of another, instilled from without"*. Actually it is Christ Himself who has been made our righteousness, according to 1 Corinthians 1:30, *"Whom (Christ) God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption"*. This is the first kind of righteousness by which God justifies us through faith.[246] A believing Christian needs not to do anything, nor can he do anything, to attain this alien righteousness. That is, he is justified by grace alone. He receives the perfect righteousness based on God's promises, from "*extra nos*"—alien to and outside of the believer, so it does not depend on his performance to receive, keep or maintain this righteousness. It is already perfect because it is the righteousness in and of Christ, actually it is Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:30). That is an incredible assurance whenever the Christian is in need of affirming his/her faith!

At the same time, there exists another kind, the "proper righteousness"; by which

[246] *LW* 31:297.

he can, and must, do righteous works actively out of himself. This second kind of righteousness is the basis for loving and serving his neighbor. It is important to note that this second kind of active righteousness is always dependent on the first kind, passively received righteousness from Christ: "*This [second kind of] righteousness is the product of the righteousness of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence . . .* ".[247] Put it another way, this is saying that "Good works are fruits of a righteous life", again reaffirming what Luther's saying we mentioned earlier, that *"Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works"*.[248]

These fundamental elements of the gospel, despite their simple and plain contents, often become obscured because the passive righteousness, in particular, is " . . . *hidden in a mystery, which the world does not understand*". In fact, "*Christians themselves do not adequately understand it or grasp it in the midst of their temptations*"! Therefore, Luther insists, "*it must always be taught and continually exercised*".[249] This is a compelling reason why we must preach paraenesis, especially when our listeners are constantly facing the trials and temptations in life.

The strength of this paradigm is now obvious: it directs despairing sinners to **a higher righteousness** that is not in themselves and is passively received; thus diminishes any tendency and lingering hope (and the ensuing frustration) of "earning" it by works. At the same time, they are liberated to exercise righteousness actively in doing **good works** in whatever vocations God calls them to, without worrying about errors of merit mentality, legalism or hypocrisy. Many difficulties and confusions in sanctification and good works can be thus alleviated. There is neither any more perplexity about the role of works in justification nor concerns about the error of

[247] *LW* 31:300.

[248] *LW* 31:361.

[249] *LW* 26:5.

plexity about the role of works in justification nor concerns about the error of working for their own glory. Christians are liberated, motivated and empowered to work righteously in total freedom. They may do good works as much as they like, as long as this vital truth of Two Kinds of Righteousness is "*continually taught and exercised*"; and made the context of all paraenesis preaching.

3. *Faith Active through Love*

Back in *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther applies this insight to the good works a Christian does toward his neighbor. A Christian needs to do no works for himself in order to attain (the alien) righteousness and salvation. So he is completely free to do (the proper) righteous works good for his neighbor:

> *Therefore he should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and the advantage of his neighbor.*[250]

This sounds too radical. Can I really ignore all my own needs and care for others? Yet Luther did not presumptuously invent the idea. It is exactly what the Apostle Paul insists in his paraenesis to the Corinthian church, as Luther observes:

> *The Apostle commands us to work with our hands so that we may give to the needy, although he might have said that we should work to support ourselves. He says, however, "that he may be able to give to those in need" [Eph. 4:28].*[251]

Actually, even the good works one does apparently for his own body are ultimately for this selfless purpose:[252]

> *This is what makes caring for the body a Christian work, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work, to acquire, and lay by funds with*

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[250] *LW* 31:365.

[251] *Ibid*.

[252] *LW* 31:379. This is the additional purpose for doing works to control one's own body. Luther later summarizes this part of discourse by saying "*Any work that is not done solely for the purpose of keeping the body under control or of serving one's neighbor, as long as he asks nothing contrary to God, is not good or Christian*."

which to aid those who are in need, . . . [253]

This is genuine love for one's neighbor, resulted only from genuine faith. Luther depicts such a Christian life in the following way:

> *. . . the strong member may serve the weaker, and we may be sons of God, each eating for and working for the other, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ [Galatians 6:2].*[254]

This life is "*truly Christian*" in style and in mentality. It is motivated and empowered by faith in the gospel, not ruled by law. It seeks no gain for oneself because faith avails a true Christian all good blessings God has in store for him whenever he needs them. This is a display of Christian freedom.

> *This is a truly Christian life. Here* ***faith is truly active through love*** *[Gal. 5:6], that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith.*[255]

This life of "**faith active through love**" is the expression of our "proper righteousness". Such an active faith should always be our core conviction to empower us in doing all good works. This active righteousness, as the fruit of the passive righteousness, should be the context of all paraeneses preached.

4. *The Confessional Third Use of the Law and the Purported Impasse*

At this point we may take a second look at the alleged "impasse" of the law-gospel preaching. The supposed problem is that it is necessary to preach the third use of the law to the regenerate Christians, as the Lutheran Confessions insist: "*the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, . . . also upon true believ-*

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[253] *LW* 31:365.

[254] *Ibid*., emphasis mine.

[255] *Ibid*.

ers".[256] Yet at the same time, the gospel of Christ, who is the "end" of the law (Rom. 10:4), should be the last word, which has categorically closed the door to the law for truly regenerate Christians. This argument is actually an artificial dichotomy that completely ignores the *simul*. The Lutheran Confessions, in arguing for the third use of the law, explicitly emphasize this truth:

> *For although they are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, yet in the present life this regeneration and renewal is not complete, but only begun, and believers are, by the spirit of their mind, in a constant struggle against the flesh, that is, against the corrupt nature and disposition which cleaves to us unto death.*[257]

While Christ being "*the end of the law*" applies to the "new man" alone, a "*simul*" Christian still needs the law all the days of his earthly life. The difference is that the Old Adam can be subdued now, by the new man who is led by the Spirit. The Confessions make a clear distinction between "the works of the law" and "the fruits of the Spirit". It is "*called works of the Law as long as they are only extorted from man by urging the punishment and threatening of God's wrath*."[258] Yet from a totally different source are the "*fruits of the Spirit*".

> *Fruits of the Spirit, however, are the works which the Spirit of God who dwells in believers works through the regenerate, and which are done by believers so far as they are regenerate [spontaneously and freely],* ***as though they knew of no command, threat, or reward****; for in this manner the children of God live in the Law and walk according to the Law of God, which [mode of living] St. Paul in his epistles calls the Law of Christ and the Law of the mind, Rom. 7:25; 8:7; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2.*[259]

The fruits of the Spirit are effects of the gospel, or, the manifestation of the mes-

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[256] FC Ep VI. 3.

[257] FC Ep VI. 4.

[258] FC Ep VI. 5.

[259] FC Ep VI. 6.

sage of the law-gospel preached. They fit well with what we have been emphasizing in this chapter, that good works are the fruit of the gospel as "*faith active through love*", the proper righteousness acted out by Christians as a result of receiving the alien righteousness from above. Preaching good works in this manner within the context of the *simul* always preserves the true gospel freedom. This is what we have maintained, concerning why and how we must preach the law and gospel with paraeneses as applications every time, to all listeners including regenerate Christians. As long as we hold the preached Word in the human context of the *simul*, focus on preaching to produce faith, and keep the gospel freedom in perspective at all times, we can preach the (third use of the) law whenever it is needed, and preach it boldly and freely. There is no risk of going back to the yoke of slavery.

Actually the Confessions distinguish the third use of the law from the other two uses by saying that it specifically applies to regenerate Christians.

> *Thus the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent,* ***both to regenerate and unregenerate men****,* ***one [and the same] Law****, namely, the immutable will of God; and* ***the difference, so far as concerns obedience, is alone in man****, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does for the Law out of constraint and unwillingly what it requires of him (as* ***also the regenerate do according to the flesh****); but the believer, so far as he is regenerate, does without constraint and with a willing spirit that which no threatenings [however severe] of the Law could ever extort from him.*[260]

Although the Confessions do not explicitly define "the third use of the law" in unequivocal terms, several characteristics are certain about the third use. (1) It is not the first and second uses, thus "*Christ is the end of the law*" does not exclude its preaching to the regenerate. (2) Since it is specifically for the regenerate, it must be the result of the gospel, not of the (other two uses of the) law which cannot regenerate

[260] FC Ep VI. 7, boldface emphasis mine.

people. Thus preaching it does not deny the fact that the gospel is God's last word. (3) It is law in form and sometimes may even be identical in literal contents to the other two uses,[261] yet unlike the other two uses, only the third use functions to promote and strengthen faith, preserve the gospel freedom and produce voluntary obedience in the regenerate.

These characteristics clearly demonstrate that there is no impasse to worry about. The third use of the law is definitely what we want for paraenesis. The major reasons we prefer the exotic term "paraenesis" and the connotations expressed by it are explained in the appendix in chapter two (pp. 49-53). We may add here that the term "paraenesis" as we intend should include all aspects of practical applications to a law-gospel message; that is, all types of effects and fruits of the gospel to be reminded, urged upon, applied and practiced in the listeners' lives. Certainly most of those, such as instructions for good works and guidance for Christian living, can be clearly classified as the third use of the law; yet not all. Paraenesis also comes as comforts, encouragements and certain exhortations, which cannot be readily identified to the form of "law". That is another reason we choose the term, to cover all sermon applications. Nevertheless, the difference is mainly a choice and qualifying of terminologies, which does not affect our conclusions about overcoming the alleged impasse.

Section Five The Cross, Self-Denial and Loving Our Neighbor

We are empowered by the gospel to do good works freely. It is free in the sense

[261] *Ibid.* Note especially the phrase "one [and the same] Law, namely, the immutable will of God".

that we are not coerced to do them. There are no laws or rules for us to keep or conform to (Gal. 5:22). However, it does not mean that these works are of less value or can be done in a careless manner. The good works we do willingly are precious. Actually they are priceless. They are the result of faith in the Lord who died on the cross for us. When we actively do good works to love our neighbor, it is to be recognized and remembered at all times that these works are good because Christ is good, and we have passively received His sacrificial love for us. We are but following His steps of self-denial in the way of the cross: "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*" (Matthew 16:24).

1. *The Self Emptying of Christ (Philippians 2)*

Luther is very fond of Paul's paraeneses to the Philippian church in the Epistle, especially Philippians Chapter Two. He based the *Hymn of Kenosis* (Phil. 2:5-11)[262] to deliver his sermon on *The Two Kinds of Righteousness* in 1519.[263] Here in *The Freedom of a Christian*, he again referred to the self-emptying of Christ as a divine example for Christian life of love. It is a demonstration of good works empowered by the gospel. Luther writes:

> *Accordingly Paul, after teaching the Philippians how rich they were made through faith in Christ, in which they obtained all things, thereafter teaches them, saying, "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" [Phil. 2:1–4]. Here we see clearly that the Apostle has prescribed this rule for the life of Christians, namely, that we should devote all our*

[262] This passage is a hymn of praise for Christ's self-emptying (kenosis: empty, from the Greek verb κενόω in verse 7. This hymn is also known as *Carmen Christi*, a Christological ode used among early believers. See Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii: 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 1-3, 24-25.

[263] *LW* 31: 295.

> *works to the welfare of others, since each has such abundant riches in his faith that all his other works and his whole life are a surplus with which he can by voluntary benevolence serve and do good to his neighbor.*[264]

The passage Luther cites, Philippians 2:1-4, is actually Paul's paraeneses for the church in Philippi. Being exhortations for Christians to do something, they are formally (that is, judged by the form) recognized as commandments, or law. Yet they are by no means laws to cause guilty feeling, to terrify the conscience and bring about knowledge of sin, as the purpose and function of the law in the law-gospel paradigm. They are things the Christians are actually empowered to do voluntarily. We will see here that they are preached on the basis of the gospel, not only what Paul preached in Philippians chapter 1, but in the whole Epistle to the Philippians. This is the characteristic of paraenesis. The requirements of the law, which we sinners feel burdensome and are unable to fulfill; the gospel empowers us to do with gladness. Preaching paraenesis is always the expression of the gospel applied, not the preparation for receiving it.

To motivate the Philippians in more tangible ways, and clarify what this "*same mind . . . same love*" connotes, Paul set a perfect example before them: "*Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 2:5). While Christ is so infinitely superior that there is no way we would ever dream to claim Him for name-dropping; He voluntarily humbled Himself, to an infinite degree, to claim kindred with us lowly sinners. Actually He had gone even lower to the form of a slave, in order to serve us. The contrast depicted in Philippians 2:6-7 between the form (μορφή) of God and servant (δοῦλος, i.e., bond slave) is shocking. The plunge is from God the absolute ruler to a slave! What is more, He took human likeness (ὁμοίωμα, Phil. 2:7), deliberately made Himself like (ὁμοιόω, verb, in Heb. 2:17) his

[264] *LW* 31:366.

brothers in every respect; thus this sinless man could claim all our sins and shames and carry them with Him to the cross, in order to set us free.

> *. . . though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:6–8).*

His humility and suffering is beyond our comprehension. Here Luther points out the essence of the way of the cross. Christ, who could have rightly exalted Himself above us and assume power over us; had on the contrary

> *. . . so lived, labored, worked, suffered, and died that He might be like other men and in fashion and in actions be nothing else than a man, just as if he had need of all these things and had nothing of the form of God. But he did all this for our sake, that he might serve us and that all things which he accomplished in this form of a servant might become ours.*[265]

The Scripture continues with worship, praise and adoration of Christ's exaltation:

> *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-12).*

This is the gospel for every sinner, the good news for a sinner who desperately covets liberation from the bondage of sin, guilt, shame and the penalty of eternal death. When this good news is preached to such sinners as we are, Christ becomes not only our "*righteousness, sanctification and redemption*" (1 Cor.1:30); He now serves as a perfect example and aspiration: that we would want to humble ourselves and serve our neighbor. Unlike ordinary examples, this divine example is the very embodiment of the gospel of the cross in its full expression. It does more than inspiring. It arouses faith. This is what Luther says a little while earlier:

> *This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is truly active through love [Gal.*

[265] *LW* 31:366.

> *5:6], that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith.*[266]

A Christian, when brought under the cross, cannot help but start to comprehend the significance of this stunning reality to his own life. He will be then "*filled and made rich by faith*" and be "*content with this form of God*". He is "*made perfect*" in the sense that ". . . *this faith is his life, his righteousness, and his salvation: it saves him and makes him acceptable, and bestows upon him all things that are Christ's*".[267]

This Christian, being free of any needs for himself, is now motivated by the gospel to "*give himself as a Christ to his neighbor*".[268] He is empowered through the cross to

> . . . *empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, . . . and to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him.*[269]

His aspiration is to do whatever he sees *"is necessary, profitable, and salutary"* to his neighbor, while through faith he himself already has "*an abundance of all good things in Christ*".[270] The paraenesis in *Philippians* 2, "*do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves"*, and "*look not only to one's own interests, but also to the interests of others"* etc. (Phil. 2:3-4), is now a natural consequence to the amazing grace the Christian has received. It is the fruit of the gospel, a free, joyful response to the good news in Christ, even though the paraenesis may appear in form as commandment/law, that is, what God wants us to do.

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[266] *LW* 31:365.

[267] *LW* 31:366.

[268] *Ibid*.

[269] *Ibid*.

[270] *LW* 31:367.

2. *Sons of the Heavenly Father*

In addition to the fact that it is exemplified in Christ, Luther finds this voluntary, selfless service to one's neighbor a reflection of the very divine grace of God the Father. "*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matt. 5:48). This well-known saying from the Sermon on the Mount has troubled many preachers as well as sincere Christians. Usually it is taken by the apparent literal sense as a command for perfect purity in holiness/sanctification. That would make it a harsh law for absolute personal perfection. Yet Luther notices that Jesus' focus is to urge His listeners to

> *. . . love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust* (Matt. 5:44-45).

Luther thus argues that the purpose of this passage is to illustrate the Father's mercy and exhort the listeners "*If you want to be called true children of the Father in heaven, then let His example move you to live and act the way He does*".[271] He contends, "*We cannot be or become perfect in the sense that we do not have any sin, the way they [the sophists] dream about perfection*"; rather, ". . . *the doctrine is that we should love not only those who do us good, but our enemies, too*", and therefore, "*whoever teaches this and lives according to this teaching, teaches and lives perfectly*".[272]

That means, this "perfect-ness" in context is not about a sinless life, but the imitation of the Father's love for all people without regards to whether they deserve it. The "therefore" in verse 48 makes it unmistakable that this command must be derived

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[271] *LW* 21:125.

[272] *LW* 21:129.

directly from the flow of thought in those preceding verses. Such an understanding qualifies the meaning of the perfect-ness of our heavenly Father to be His all-embracing love and boundless mercy to all, without any condition or discrimination. Personal purity or piety is not the concern here. Those who love even their enemy, whose love is without conditions and dependence on the object's response or reciprocation, exhibit the evidence that they are sons of the Father! In other words, being "perfect" is all about "loving your neighbor as yourself".[273]

This is also Luther's emphasis on good works in *The Freedom of a Christian*. Faith in the Father who overwhelms a person with immeasurable riches enables him to love his neighbor without concerns for his own benefits. Through faith, the genuine love is already the perfect-ness of the Father Who makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good.

> *Behold, from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss . . .* [274]

This freedom to love is obviously not a result of carefully calculated conformity to commandments and rules; in which case perfection would be impossible. Only a son of an extravagantly merciful Father is able to forget his own desires and love his neighbor without expecting reciprocation.

> *He does not distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or unthankfulness, but he most freely and most willingly spends himself and all that he has, whether he wastes all on the thankless or whether he gains a reward.*[275]

The source of power that enables him to deny himself and love so freely can only

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[273] Most Lutheran commentators hold this interpretation. See, for example, Martin H. Franzmann, *Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew* (St.Louis: Concordia, 1961), chapter 2.

[274] *LW* 31:367.

[275] *Ibid*.

be found in the Father's grace.

> *. . . if we recognize the great and precious things which are given us, . . . our hearts will be filled by the Holy Spirit with the love which makes us free, joyful, almighty workers and conquerors over all tribulations, servants of our neighbors, and yet lords of all.*[276]

This is again "faith active in love", the gospel in action, and the source of power that enables us to do good works and love our neighbor without self-conscious calculation. In this freedom of self-denial we are actually fulfilling the "impossible demand" of Matthew 5:48 " . . . *be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*".[277]

3. *Freedom and Discernment — Not Every Neighbor Is the Same*

We may, at this point, naively assume that to "love your neighbor as yourself" is straightforward, as long as we have faith. Yet in practice, there could be issues to complicate things, for not every neighbor is the same. Luther cautions us that we need to exercise discernment.

One of the issues Luther was dealing with had to do with the traditional church ceremonies. On one side, there were those who just "*want to show that they are free . . . by despising and finding fault with ceremonies, traditions, and human laws*", while on the other extreme were those who "*rely for their salvation solely on their reverent observance of ceremonies*".[278]

Both these extremes were in error "*because they neglect the weightier things*

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[276] *Ibid*.

[277] Bruner, a non-Lutheran scholar, holds similar interpretation and actually argues for Christian freedom from it: "*In this command Jesus frees behavior from calculation . . . Disciples are to love even enemies unconditionally. This is real liberation*". And on v. 48 specifically, "*Maturity, [τέλειος, commonly rendered 'perfect', is translated into mature in Bruner's commentary] . . . is a whole-souled commitment—for Jesus' sake, . . .—to the protection of every other person*." and "*If the other person is the focus, and if Jesus is the focuser, disciples are the lens*". The disciples' selfless love is the center theme of this passage, which leads to total freedom. Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), 217, 225.

[278] *LW* 31:372.

which are necessary to salvation".[279] Yet they were stubborn and arrogant, insisting only they were right. To these, Luther likens them as "wolves"[280] among God's people, identifies them with the Pharisees whom Jesus rebukes as "*blind guides*" (Matt. 15:14). And lest they lead others as the blind lead the blind, that both will fall into a pit, such obstinate "neighbors" Luther advises us to "*resist and offend boldly . . . for the sake of the liberty of faith*".[281] For example, break the fasts when they demand to fast on certain days.

There were, however, other people who were just "*the simple-minded, ignorant men, weak in the faith*", who were "*yet [to] grasp the liberty of faith*", as they would be willing to do so if rightly taught and given time.[282] These neighbors are "sheep"[283] who are weak in faith, whom we must not offend, but "*yield to their weakness until they are more fully instructed*".[284] If they consider fasting necessary on certain days, observe it. That was why Paul circumcised Timothy at one occasion, yet at another occasion he refused to circumcise Titus. Luther explains:

> *St. Paul also circumcised his disciple Timothy, not because circumcision was necessary for his righteousness, but that he might not offend or despise the Jews who were weak in the faith and could not yet grasp the liberty of faith. But, on the other hand, when they despised the liberty of faith and insisted that circumcision was necessary for righteousness, he resisted them and did not allow Titus to be circumcised Gal. 2[:3]. Just as he was unwilling to offend or despise any man's weak faith and yielded to their will for a time, so he was also unwilling that the liberty of faith should be offended against or despised by stubborn, work-righteous men. He chose a middle way, sparing the weak for a time, but*

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[279] *Ibid*.

[280] *LW* 31:374.

[281] *LW*31:373.

[282] *Ibid*.

[283] *LW* 31:374.

[284] *Ibid*.

> *always withstanding the stubborn, that he might convert all to the liberty of faith. What we do should be done with the same zeal to sustain the weak in faith, as in Rom. 14[:1]; but we should firmly resist the stubborn teachers of works.*[285]

The discernment to treat different neighbors, "wolves" and "sheep", in different ways is not profound. It does not require complicated philosophy or theology. The difficulty lies in my willingness to deny myself and take up my cross. On the one hand, the "wolves" are hard to deal with for they are stubborn and dominant, and often the powerful and influential in society. Resisting them does not fall in line with my self-gratifying instincts, and it might cost me favors from them as well as from my own circles. Moreover, it takes extraordinary courage of love to confront them, to do what is right and good for them, in order to preserve true liberty of faith and hopefully introduce some of them to the liberty. On the other hand, the "sheep" could often be excessively prudish in even trivial things, to the extent that it becomes unbearably irritating at times. It takes a lot of patience in love, and sometimes substantial sacrifices, to bear with them and go along with them for a time, in order to tenderly guide them into true liberty of faith. And even I am successful, it will not be gratifying in tangible ways because they are probably not among the significant classes in my social circles anyway.

Discernment here is hard not because wisdom or knowledge is wanting; but because it takes genuine love, courage and patience, with willingness to purposefully sacrifice my own interests and preferences for my neighbor. These are not inherent virtues found in ourselves, but strengths *extra nos* by faith in the self-denial of Christ on the cross. And it is only when we are transformed in our minds and genuinely believe that the freedom of faith is of supreme worth over other things, can we attain the discernment and power to face the challenges. "*This is the command of love*

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[285] *LW* 31:369.

which would harm no one but would serve all men", says Luther.[286] Yes, it is a command, yet it is only for those who are totally free to keep it. In fact, not only "harm no one", they would actively seek to do good works to benefit their neighbor, even at the cost of their own interest. This is true love from true faith, the genuine self-denial in practice.

4. *Paraenesis of Sanctification in Christian Life*

It is appropriate at this point to re-evaluate the popular criticism that Lutheran theology is "strong in justification and weak on sanctification". "Sanctification" literally means being set apart for the LORD. Many teaching resources on personal sanctification and their resulting methods or techniques are actually weak on this aspect. The theories by themselves might appear correct, yet in practice they cannot escape the risks of leading the inherently self-centered sinners astray, because these teachings are often inwardly focused. Even meditations on Christ could become an "inner" discipline of personal improvement, virtually detached from the foundation of all our sanctification, that is, the Lord Himself.

In contrast, Luther's insistence that faith is a dynamic relationship with God, that our sanctification is upward focused in Christ, and our active good works are purely outward focused for the benefit of our neighbor; all direct our spiritual quests towards a center that is *extra nos*. We root our faith in Christ, not in our own determination. And we pursue righteous works in love for our neighbor, seeking no rewards or glory for ourselves. This self-denying, upward and outward focus liberates us from self-conscious pursuits for spirituality. Rather, we are already perfect "sons of the heavenly Father"; that is, we are set apart from the world and consecrated to the Father for His will alone. That is true sanctification! The teachings are uncompli-

[286] *LW* 31:374.

cated and the practices are straightforward. Yet it is by no means "weak on sanctification". This is the dynamics of genuine Christian life. Not improvement or progress in and of oneself, but a dynamic reliance on God's grace, expressed in doing righteous works of love for one's neighbor.

Luther does not, of course, disregard improvement or progress towards maturity altogether. Yet he teaches them very carefully. For example, in discussions on the "outward man" with analogy of Adam in the Paradise in *The Freedom of a Christian*, he says that a believer, being restored to Paradise through faith, needs no works to be righteous. He only does good works freely to please God. "*However, we are not wholly recreated . . . our faith and love are not yet perfect, these are* ***to be increased****, not by external works, however, but of themselves*".[287] Therefore, the quest for progress in faith and love is legitimate and needful, yet not by artificial works of merit in and of oneself. Any increase, or progress, is of faith and love themselves. We should also bear in mind Luther's insistence right from the start of this *treatise*, that faith and love, of which we are admonished here to increase and make progress, are not inner virtues of our own. They are relationships with God or with other human beings. One cannot store up faith or love in his/her own spiritual reservoirs apart from the respective objects. It is absurd to "increase" such abstract concepts without engaging with their objects. That is, no progress can be made by oneself alone for inner spirituality.

A little bit later, in expounding the "Hymn of Kenosis", Luther zeroes in on Christ's self-humbling: from the form of God to that of a servant, He "*humbled Himself and became obedient unto death*" for our sake, so that "*He might serve us and*

[287] *LW* 31:360, boldface emphasis mine. As cautioned earlier, Luther had not in this *treatise* formulated the concept of the *simul* into doctrinal statements, and his language might not be rigorous about the scattered ideas at times.

that all things which he accomplished in this form of a servant might become ours."[288] A Christian may obtain "*the form of God*" through faith and be fully content. Yet still "*he should* ***increase this faith*** *until it is made perfect*", with the goal "*the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (Gal. 2:[20])*".[289]

What is interesting is the way Luther prescribes immediately to "*increase this faith*":

> *Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him.*[290]

Unlike many methods of self-cultivation for inner spirituality, Luther points to the way of the cross as the way to increase our faith and love—via sacrifice and servitude. While enjoying the total freedom before God through faith, he/she takes the form of a servant voluntarily in love to serve his/her neighbor. This is the hidden secret of sanctification in light of the cross. It is this kind of Christian life that is taught in *The Freedom of a Christian*, totally free, yet willingly serving others:

> *Who then can comprehend the riches and the glory of the Christian life? It can do all things and has all things and lacks nothing. It is lord over sin, death, and hell, and yet at the same time it serves, ministers to, and benefits all men.*[291]

This freedom of self-denying Christian life is what we preach whenever paraenesis is called for.

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[288] *LW* 31:366.

[289] *Ibid*, boldface emphasis mine.

[290] *Ibid.*

[291] *LW* 31:368.

Section Six A Brief Summary — Luther's Theology of Paraenesis Preaching

We have argued that "faith active through love" is the impetus for good works. This conclusion again demonstrates the crucial significance of faith in Christian life. Faith, the dynamic relationship which connects us to God, alone directs us *extra nos* to Christ who is our wisdom, justification, sanctification and redemption. In this way faith sets us free from self-reliance and self-seeking, and it works through love for us to do good to serve our neighbor. Luther maintains throughout the whole treatise of *The Freedom of a Christian*: " . . . *true faith in Christ is a treasure beyond comparison which brings with it complete salvation and saves man from every evil*".[292]

Now, since faith comes by hearing the Word of God in a dynamic manner every time, it is we the preachers' sacred, compelling responsibility every time to preach the Word with a clear purpose to generate faith in the listeners. This is the one non-negotiable purpose for all kinds of preaching. We may at times fall short of needed rebukes or fail to offer clear instructions; yet as long as the sermons are faithful to the Word they might still be helpful in some ways. However, when a sermon fails to generate faith toward the One who is *extra nos*, it could be worse than being useless because it is likely to misguide listeners away from the fountain of salvation into self-reliance.

While the gospel with God's promises in Christ creates faith, it is up to the application part of the sermon to practically implement faith in the listener's daily life.

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[292] *LW* 31:347.

As the saying goes, "we need to hear the gospel every day, because we forget it every day",[293] people need the good news more than a mere pronouncement. They need guidance, instruction, admonition and sometimes comfort and encouragement in every practical way to put faith into practice in life, day in and day out. In the context of the *simul*, it further connotes that faith, and faith alone, awakens, empowers and energizes the new man, coming into being through the gospel, to overcome the old Adam in a Christian, whenever temptations or trials occur. All that which pertains to the freedom from sin in driving out the lusts or in subduing the flesh does not rest on our inner virtue, cultivation or will power, but on faith in Christ. The freedom that the law, weakened by the flesh, could not attain is now attainable through faith in the Son of God who came in the likeness of sinful flesh to atone for our sin. This is an ultimate mystery obscured to our eyes of the flesh, until we see it through the cross. The restrictive requirements of the law are fulfilled with total freedom as we willingly deny ourselves.

To sum it all, no matter what types of paraenesis we are preaching, be it encouragement, admonishment, instruction or rebuke, there must always be a clear purpose to invigorate faith based on the gospel, the faith that leads us "*extra nos*" — turning from self centeredness upward in Christ and outward, with good works as "faith active through love", towards the neighbor. When all this is properly put in the perspective of the cross, the gospel freedom is firmly preserved at all times, and we can preach boldly whatever it takes, including the third use of the law, to build up the listeners. There is no room left for submitting again to a yoke of slavery. There is no concern for the alleged impasse. Luther summarizes it succinctly:

> *. . . [A] Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor . . . He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is*

[293] See discussions on this saying in chapter four, section three-4 on p.84, and footnote 191.

caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love.[294]

[294] *LW* 31:371.

Chapter Six　Paraenesis in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

Section One　New Testament Epistles and Paraeneses

We have in the previous chapters examined Luther's "theology of paraenesis preaching" based on his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* and supplemented with some other writings of him.　We have discovered that there is a distinctive focus on preaching to arouse the dynamic faith leading to love in action, and the same focus to safeguard the gospel freedom.　Equipped with these findings of Luther's theological distinctives for paraenesis preaching, we are ready to examine some examples of sermons to demonstrate how these theological insights can guide us in preaching. There are plenty of resources for this purpose, and Martin Luther's own sermons can be among the most representative of them; however, not all these sermons are equally efficacious.　Human preachers, however mightily used by God, are still humans. Their sermons may or may not reflect the good and right uses of paraenesis.　A good sermon may still contain portions that do not withstand careful scrutiny.　Therefore, instead of being selective from human sermons for our sampling of illustrations, we will first go to the God-inspired resources and choose a New Testament Epistle in its entirety to check against our ideas summarized above.

Among the resources, the one ready for our examination is Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, which is an actual sermon loaded with paraeneses.　It has already been

studied in part in the previous chapter of this study, where we are familiarized with the "Hymn of Kenosis" in Philippians chapter two; based on which Luther proposes the doctrine of Two Kinds of Righteousness. In the following sections we will analyze the messages in the Philippians as the touchstone to check the validity of the theological distinctives of Luther; and in the process, to discover ways of applying them in our own paraenesis preaching.

Section Two Law and Gospel in the Epistle of Philippians

First of all, we are obliged to establish that the law-gospel paradigm is in fact operative in this epistle, and it works in a manner that is compatible with what we have described previously in this study, particularly in the first two chapters. To that end, we must first identify the passages of most critical impacts on the concepts of "law" and "gospel", and investigate their respective messages and functions in this epistle. Since the connotations of these two terms depend on doctrinal positions and also vary with contexts, as discussed in chapter two of this study, it is necessary to qualify the concepts of "law" and "gospel" in the following discussions, based on our approach to the preaching paradigm adopted earlier. Thus the term "law" below refers to statements which not only stipulate what a person ought to do according to God's will, but also, specifically, accuses that person of failing to do them. Its purpose is to condemn him/her of his/her sins and convict his/her conscience of his/her guilt. As stated in the Lutheran Confessions, " . . . *everything that reproves sin is, and belongs to, the preaching of the Law*".[295] Correspondingly the term "gospel" refers to the proclamation of what God has done for that person that which he/she is

[295] FC Ep V. 4.

not able, and has failed, to do, by grace in the redemptive work in Christ. In the Confessions, it is qualified as

> *. . . a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but comforts consciences against the terrors of the Law, points alone to the merit of Christ, and raises them up again by the lovely preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit.*[296]

Through faith the message of gospel offers salvation to that person.

Accordingly, although "*the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts*",[297] that is, law and gospel (or in Luther's words in *The Freedom of a Christian*, "*commandments and promises*"); not every verse, without taking the larger contexts into account, can be thus categorized according to these qualifications above. In the following discussions, only those statements which **directly** declare these messages of accusation or salvation count and their functions are analyzed. Other parts of this epistle, whether they serve as boosting the force of the law or enhancing the gospel,[298] are not counted in this section of discussion because they are indirect in declaring the specific messages concerning our eternal destiny. They will be examined after this section to demonstrate how Paul applies paraeneses in Philippians.

In the following analyses, we will first look at the anchor of Paul's approach to the law-gospel proclamation in this epistle. This focus is clearly on the cross of Christ. Although not many passages can be identified to be direct law or gospel passages, their overall message is highly unified and penetrating.

1. *Law*

It is notable that very few verses touch on the concept of law in the first two

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[296] FC Ep V. 7.

[297] *LW* 31:348.

[298] It is in this general sense that "*the entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts*" of law and gospel.

chapters, which takes up more than half of the entire epistle already. There are only some incidental mentions of the law, such as this passage about the law broken by the opponents of the gospel, and the inevitable suffering of believers:

> *. . . and not frightened in anything by **your opponents**. This is a clear sign to them of **their destruction**, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have (1:28-30).*

Or, a broad accusation of this generation at large in contrast to believers as children of God:

> *Do all things **without grumbling or disputing**, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of **a crooked and twisted generation**, among whom you shine as lights in the world (2:14-15).*[299]

The main expression of law does not come in its full swing until chapter three. There, Paul declares the blatant warning against the practices of the Judaizers: "*Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh*". (3:2) Those who boast according to their flesh by their works of the law, circumcision in particular, are actually workers of evils. Without turning to Christ who is the fulfillment of the Law, what they do is no longer the "circumcision (περιτομή)" of God's covenant, but "mutilation (κατατομήν, accusative of κατατομή)" — the mere cutting of the flesh, which is ironically prohibited by the law (Leviticus 21:5).[300]

There are cases in the Old Testament that the enemies of God are called "dogs"; for example, Psalm 22:16, 20 or Isaiah 56:10-11. Now these Judaizers who set confidence in their flesh have actually broken the Law and made themselves the enemies

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[299] These passages, as well as others like Phil. 2:1-5, each in itself serves as paraenesis rather than law (see explanations in chapter five, section five on pp.115-6). Only the boldface-marked phrases here are notions of the law.

[300] Balz and Schneider, EDNT Vol. 2, 269. See also Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament,* vol.2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1886).

of God, and are to be looked out for. This condemnation is emphatically echoed a few verses later "*For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ*" (3:18). There can be no harsher accusation than this.

While the true circumcision are we who worship in the Spirit and glory only in Christ, (3:3) Paul further condemns the reliance on the works of the law and confidence in one's own flesh, enumerating the vain works which he used to boast about, as negative examples:

> *. . . though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless* (3:4-6).

The errors Paul tries to demonstrate by his strong language of law here are not immoral behaviors or lewd lusts. Those things are definitely sinful, but more fundamental than they is the self-righteous zeal under the cover of the good works of the law. Recounting his own errors in sin prior to knowing Christ, Paul is exposing this self-centered idolatry in everybody. We might each boast about different privileges and advantages, but putting confidence in our own flesh is common to all. We might behave well and do virtuous works. But, if our whole perspective of life is not transformed, and our value systems remain the same as what they were before knowing Christ; then in what ways are we different from those "evildoers" and "dogs", warned against so harshly by an "ex-evildoer"? Luther portrays these *"enemies of the cross of Christ"* in his *Proofs of the Thesis Debated in the Chapter at Heidelberg*:

> *He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glow to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls "enemies of the cross of Christ" [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross*

and suffering and love works and the glory of works.[301]

Paul pronounces the judgment on the destiny of those who refuse to be transformed by the gospel: "*Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things*" (3:19). People might claim to be Christians and go to church—which was the case with some of the Judaizers contemporary to Paul. They even serve in church with dignity and enthusiasm. But they could be the worst idolaters because their god is not what they claim to be, and they might not even realize it. The root problem is their mindset to begin with—it is all "*on earthly things*". The whole value system for life has never been transformed.

This is the law stipulated in this epistle. Brief, yet utterly serious and dead on target. Obviously on purpose, Paul does not take into consideration many other highly significant aspects of the law.[302] Here in Philippians, he ignores them all and zeroes in solely on the issues concerning the core values of life, which he deems most important for his readers at the time. His letter mercilessly reveals the idols of vain glory deeply hidden in the life of everybody in everywhere, including a Christian today. Although in a more or less incidental manner here, this powerful declaration of the law has necessitated the inescapable conclusion for anybody who reads the letter, that the gospel of the cross is the only way out. The declaration of the law has served its purpose incisively.

2. *Gospel*

Paul starts the epistle, right after the greetings, with a general affirmation of the gospel in 1:3-6. Paul remembers the Philippians in church and prays for them with

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[301] *LW* 31:53.

[302] Particularly prohibitions and reproaches of sinful behavior, which Paul does expound extensively elsewhere within various contexts in almost every New Testament Epistle he wrote; for example, Eph. 4:17-19, 26-31; 5:3-7 or 1 Cor. 5, 6. Also see Luther's elucidations in his Lectures on Galatians 5:13-15 (*LW* 27:48-63).

joy (1:3-4) because " . . . *I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" (1:6)

The gospel content here is taken as a given which requires no further elaboration for the Philippians, as Paul expresses his fond memory of their "*partnership in the gospel*" (1:5). It is a good work that has begun by Christ in and among them and will surely be brought to completion by Him too. It is purely God's doing from the very beginning to the end.

While this gospel motif permeates the paraeneses throughout the whole letter, the actual explicit statements of the gospel are concentrated in a few passages. We are looking for specific gospel expressions as qualified above; something Luther describes in the early phase of his argument in *The Freedom of a Christian*, which directly stipulates what God has done for us, and how we are to attain it:

> *You may ask, "What then is the Word of God, . . . since there are so many words of God?" I answer: The Apostle explains this in Romans 1.* ***The Word is the gospel of God concerning his Son, who was made flesh, suffered, rose from the dead, and was glorified through the Spirit who sanctifies****. To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it, provided it believes the preaching.* ***Faith alone is the saving and efficacious use of the Word of God****, according to Rom. 10[:9]: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Furthermore, "Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified" [Rom. 10:4]. Again, in Rom. 1[:17], "He who through faith is righteous shall live." The Word of God cannot be received and cherished by any works whatever but only by faith.*[303]

There are scattered statements in Philippians with clear inferences to the gospel messages, such as this one: "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*." (1:21); made to affirm Paul's consolation and encouragement for his readers. It is an assertion that neither life nor death is in my own hands, but I would appreciate either with

[303] *LW* 31:346, boldface emphases mine.

joy through faith in Christ. The message of the cross is nuanced in it. This motif is fully explicated and elaborated in the second chapter after a strong admonition for unity, humility and love (2:1-4). It is the celebrated "Hymn of Kenosis" which we have already studied in the previous chapter of this study, where Christ's self-denying way of the cross becomes explicit:

> *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (2:5-11).

It should be cautioned here that normally "*the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ*" is an "*earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath*",[304] and thus is the preaching of the law. But here in this Hymn of Kenosis, the whole focus is **not** on that which "*proclaims God's wrath and terrifies man*",[305] but completely on the voluntary self-humbling and self-denial of Christ. Therefore, the preaching of Christ's death here is an emphatic expression of what God has done to save us; "*which is properly the preaching of the Gospel*".[306] What is articulated in this hymn is the praise and adoration of the incarnation, ministry, suffering and death of the self-emptying Christ. It consummates in His resurrection and exaltation. The profound love of God for us is expressed in the ultimate self-denial of Christ for the atonement of our sins, and thus our salvation. This is one of the clearest and

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[304] FC Ep V. 9.

[305] FC Ep V. 10.

[306] *Ibid*.

most powerful expositions of the central message in the Four Gospels: " . . . *the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mt. 20:28; Cf. Mk. 10:45, Lk. 22:27, Jn. 10:11, etc.).

This perspective of the gospel, focusing on the cross of Christ, presents before our eyes the most precious and excellent gift in life we can ever receive. It is a lasting gift of true life now and into eternity, which we can never treasure more. And it is costly—so costly that even the wealth of the whole universe would not be able to afford a billionth of it. It is the unfathomable love of God that Christ the Son would empty Himself of the dominion over all into the servitude under all; and humble Himself from divine immortality to the mortal human flesh, ultimately into death on the cross; in order that we may receive this inconceivably precious gift of redemption and eternal life for free. This overwhelming gospel motif actually accentuates the uncompromising message of the law in the next chapter, and the richer gospel messages thereafter.

3. *The Structural Order and the Last Word of the Law-Gospel Paradigm*

It is noteworthy that, this epistle obviously does not follow a rigid law-gospel sequential order at all. The bursting forces of the law do not appear until the gospel is explicated in depth, and what takes most space in the first chapter is actually paraeneses based on the gospel. This observation is consistent with what we have discussed in chapter one, section two in this study, that a sermon based on the law-gospel paradigm does not have to be organized in a predictable, stereotyped sequence of law first and gospel next. The analysis above substantiates our arguments there. The point is not about the structural order, whether it is law-gospel, gospel-law, or law-gospel-law, etc. What really counts is that the respective purposes and functions of law and gospel must be served properly and effectively. As long as we can grasp this essential concept, there is ample freedom to organize the structure

and plots of a sermon.

One more characteristic of the law-gospel paradigm we have insisted is that the gospel must always be the last word. This is also demonstrated in this epistle. As Paul has enunciated all those works of the law which he could have boasted about: " . . . *I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also . . . as to righteousness under the law, blameless*" (3:4-6), he follows it up right away with the gospel — the surpassing worth of knowing Christ as the most precious gift one can ever receive:

> *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of* ***the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord****. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ . . .* (3:7-8).

And similarly, as soon as he has warned against those who "*walk as enemies of the cross of Christ*", whose end is destruction (3:18-19), he immediately reassures his listeners with the firm gospel promises:

> *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself* (3:20-21).

Thus the stern accusation and conviction of the conscience from the law is always "resolved" with the assurance of the gospel.

In these few brief passages plus a few more (for example, 3:7-11, 4:7), we can see that both law and gospel have served their respective purposes and functions with the fullest power in this epistle. The law vehemently accuses and convicts; and the gospel comforts, encourages and offers promises of eternal salvation. Beside these passages, the major parts of the rest of this epistle are mostly paraeneses, a rich field for us to explore and discover.

Section Three　Paraenesis that Builds Up Faith

This epistle is full of paraeneses right from the beginning. Paul's approach to paraenesis preaching offers many aspects for us to ponder upon, while the unifying perspective for all paraeneses is clearly discernible: it is from a perspective of the cross of Christ.

1. *Faith and the "Extra Nos" Characteristics of Paraenesis*

A major part of Paul's paraeneses falls on the category of comfort and encouragement. In addition to Paul's fond memory of the Philippian church (1:3-5), the main reason is due to Paul's own imprisonment at the time (1:7, 12-17). He almost rushed into paraenesis to comfort his readers right from the beginning of this letter, as he was obviously concerned that his plight might cause them to lose heart.

Hardships in life do happen all the time. They may be milder than Paul's unjust incarceration with death a close call, but they all hurt. People need comfort and assurance to face suffering and go on with life. What would a preacher usually do in such a situation; in particular, when suffering happens to his own personal life? If the law is presumed to be the last word of God instead of the gospel, the answer would be more obvious. In addition to humanly natural kindness, he would, based on his religious instinct, entreat and challenge the listeners to be steadfast in faith in spite of the misery he is going through. For example, in case the suffering is caused by the preacher's own service to the Lord, he would further express his faith in terms of courageous determination to suffer for Christ, in an attempt to motivate the listeners to follow suit: "Don't feel sorry for me. I am determined to suffer for the Lord. So should you."

This is actually a quite common practice in sermons on suffering. There was a well-respected pastor who got imprisoned for his Christian faith. The last sermon he

delivered before going to jail was basically something like "We Christians must demonstrate our faith to the world that we truly believe. Pay whatever cost it takes for the cause of our faith. It will be your witness to the unbelieving world. Don't worry about (my) sufferings!" It did stir up a lot of solidarity among Christians.[307]

On the surface, Paul also appears to have done just that in chapter one of the Epistle to the Philippians. It is true that this kind of sermons can be emotionally effective and they do win sympathy from the listeners. But is a preacher's (or someone else's) unjust suffering or gallant determination really a reliable reason for the listeners to feel comforted? Hardly. The encouragement is momentary and the ensuing comfort is virtually illusive, as people have no other source of evidence to see **God's hands** in this matter than someone's heroic claim or act. In other words, there is nothing divine in such comfort and encouragement. If one replaces "Christians", the object of the sermon, by "followers" of any moral, social or political agendas, the same sermon remain perfectly valid. Incisive as it could be, there is nothing beyond human goodwill in the sermon to build up genuine faith in Christ. In the long run, if the suffering is eventually alleviated, the glory would go to the heroic preacher. If not, the initial enthusiasm will gradually give way to despair. Either way, faith is not built up and spiritual liberty is not preserved by the preaching. The root problem of this way of preaching and its undergirding presumption is, it looks for faith inside ourselves. It attempts to build something good based on our own zeal, goodwill, and confidence in our own will power. At this juncture it is appropriate to take a closer look into Paul's paraenesis preaching and discern the difference.

In this epistle full of comforting paraeneses, Paul said nothing about his own de-

[307] Wang Yi (王怡), 逼迫是一种测试, [Online], Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKZJBbtckeA&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR007nND1ZBc2RLry2AGVsc8gPHIqG7VszgrMYLmWPuW73MqCJESnH6DGzM (Jan.05, 2020).

termination to suffer for Christ. The least he wanted was the Philippians' sympathy or solidarity (4:10-13). He did seek solidarity, but it was not for himself at all. He was seeking solidarity diligently for the gospel in spite of his presence (or absence):

> *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel (1:27).*

His major emphasis rests upon their common cause for the gospel and the grace they all take part in:

> *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, . . . because of **your partnership in the gospel** from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all **partakers with me of grace**, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel (1:3-7, boldface emphases mine).*

In light of this fellowship in grace, he continues to interpret the circumstances brought about by his imprisonment, that his suffering "*has really served to advance the gospel*", causing other Christians there "*more bold to speak the word without fear*". Even those who did so "*out of selfish ambition*", who were motivated by jealousy of Paul, had in fact helped spread the gospel and resulted in Christ being proclaimed. "*. . . in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice*" (1:12-18).

In these things Paul had good reasons to rejoice; so did the readers of his letter. Their reasons for joy do not depend on the moral character of Paul, who was confined and unable to do anything, or of any other leaders and heroes. **The basis for their joy is *extra nos*, solidly rooted in Christ alone**. Their source for and foundation of meaningful comfort is sure and lasting. Any human hero, even Paul, could fail; yet God's grace in Christ is steadfast. This is truly reaffirming and liberating. Now, is paraenesis an appeal to obey and a re-establishment of the law; or the fruit of the

gospel? The difference really matters.

2. *A New Perspective from the Cross*[308]

True comfort in suffering liberates the spirit and quickens faith. For the purpose to awaken faith, the theme of "joy/rejoice" appears repeatedly throughout Philippians. In addition to the joyful greetings, it appears in every chapter of the Letter:

> . . . *I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith* (1:25).
>
> *Even if I am to be poured out . . . I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me* (2:17-18).
>
> . . . *that you may rejoice at seeing him (Epaphroditus) again* (2:28).
>
> *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord* (3:1).
>
> *Therefore, my brothers, . . . my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved* (4:1).
>
> *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* (4:4).
>
> *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly . . .* (4:10).

Paul keeps on turning to this thought of joy as the mutual encouragement for himself and his readers in Philippi. On this, still more careful scrutiny is called for. As we already know, the circumstances at the time of writing were by no means favorable for rejoicing. His own suffering of imprisonment was compounded by the disunity and conflict within and opposition without the church, implied in 1:27-30 and later chapters. It could have been a hard time of temptations and people would tend to seek self-preservation and finger-pointing rather than positive aspirations. By human nature, joy and freedom would be among the last things to be real in life.

Of course Paul has already shown us that the source of true comfort is rooted in

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[308] This term "new perspective" is to highlight the self-denial nature of the cross in contrast to the old man's self-preservation/self-gratification. It has nothing to do with the theories of "the New Perspective on Paul", advocated by E. P. Sanders, N. T. Wright, *et al*.

Christ. As Christians we can claim that the basis for our joy is the gospel. But our conclusion could still be naïve and superficial. Such a claim requires further elucidation, if we insist on rejoicing while acknowledging that life is full of undesirable circumstances of suffering. What good does the gospel do for life here and now? How does our gospel differ from those useless, shallow clichés people offer to us when we are in pain? What is good about the "good" news in this life that we can actually rejoice "*always*"? How do we respond to the challenge that the comfort and encouragement Paul offers are but common rationalization of life's difficulties; only that they come in a religious disguise?

After all, isn't it true that any religious one-liner could pop up some positive thinking, even based on a Bible verse or two, to patch up the deep hurts in life? Sadly, yes. It is true and such phenomena are commonplace. Yet that is exactly where the gospel of Christ becomes strikingly unique. It is the cross that has made all the difference.

The cross is never a popular idea. No pious platitudes come close to be able to scratch the remotest surface of it. The willing descent and self-sacrifice of Christ, proclaimed by the Hymn of Kenosis in Philippians chapter two, is a watershed event. When the cross is preached, **a radical subversion of worldview and a thorough transformation of value systems**[309] are taking place in the life of whoever hears the gospel with teachable ears. This Christian is **enabled to see the exceeding glory of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ hidden behind the suffering on the cross**. This is a supernatural experience which can never be mimicked by any human posi-

[309] It must be emphatically cautioned here, that the subversion of worldview and the transformation of value systems will occur only **as a result of the preaching of the cross**. Many churches are promoting "a Christian worldview", in attempts to "transform" the secular society by means of popularizing Christianity without "*the offense of the cross*" (Gal.5:11). That is putting the cart before the horse. Trying to produce divine effects by human manipulation, they are doing a disservice to the gospel.

tive thinking.

Paul vividly depicts what he is experiencing in order to demonstrate the same experience which can be happening in every Christian among his readers. He used to take confidence in the flesh, including blameless righteousness under the law (3:4-6);

> *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ . . . (3:7-8).*

The purpose of his life is no longer "*a righteousness of my own*", but "*the righteousness from God that depends on faith*", that is, the righteousness that "*comes through faith in Christ*" (3:9). It is small wonder that he would rejoice, and invite others to rejoice with him, under all hostile circumstances. Fundamentally poles apart from mere positive thinking, all Paul's paraeneses are based on this supernaturally transformed perspective of life.

Starting from the beginning of the Letter, even before he gets the chance to present the Hymn of Kenosis, Paul has been offering reassurance to the Philippians in addressing their concerns about his imprisonment. He assures them that it actually served to advance the gospel, and caused Christ to be proclaimed widely (1:12-18). Bearing in mind that the crisis facing Paul was eminently life-threatening, this is by no means empty wishful thinking that anyone can talk about superficially. What empowers Paul to see things so differently, that he would strongly urge others to see what he sees, is exactly this power of the gospel. The cross changed his perspective so fundamentally, that his own life or death is of little relevance: "*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (1:21). What really matters to him most has become "*Christ . . . be honored in my body, whether by life or by death"* (1:20).

It is in this sense he exclaims " . . . *in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice*" (1:18)

as a suffering prisoner. In the same spirit, he now invites the Philippians to be glad and rejoice with him even if he would die for their faith:

> *Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me* (2:17-18).

Throughout the whole epistle, Paul keeps on sharing his own life experiences of the cross, and inviting his readers to follow his example.

> *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us (3:17).*
>
> *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things . . . (4:9).*

Yes, as far as the power of the gospel in his life is on the agenda, Paul is never shy to urge others to imitate him, because the gospel of the cross is the only way to comfort people in suffering, leading them into freedom and joy hidden to the unbelieving world.

3. *Dynamic Faith in the Context of the "Simul"*

Paul's description of his life's transformation in Philippians Chapter 3 reflects the vital characteristic of Christian faith, that it is dynamic. It deserves a thorough examination.

We first note a difference in the tenses of the verb "count" (ἡγέομαι, meaning "consider"). " . . . *whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ*" (3:7) is in perfect tense (ἥγημαι), indicating a subversion of his whole value system, already accomplished once for all.[310] Yet immediately in the next verse, "*I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*" and subsequently "*I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish*" (3:8),

[310] "Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, TNTC vol.11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 148.

the present tense (ἡγοῦμαι) is used twice. The subtle difference is significant. In contrast to achieving certain things of his own in a fixed manner, the present tense points to an ongoing practice of lifestyle in a dynamic relationship to faith.[311]

This perspective of dynamic faith can be confirmed by Paul's vast **usage of subjunctive mood** in the following verses: " . . . *in order that I **may** gain (κερδήσω) Christ*" (v.8), "*and (may) be found in him (εὑρεθῶ)*" (v.9; note that the connotation of subjunctive mood here covers the verb forms of infinitive 'know' and participle 'share' in the next verse too!), "*that by any means possible I **may** attain (καταντήσω) the resurrection from the dead*" (v.11) and "*but I press on to make it (καταλάβω), here 'to make it' can be literally translated into 'so that I **might** make it') my own*" (v.12). All these verbs in subjunctive mood emphasize Paul's desire, motivation and pursuit for something **not yet in his possession**. In addition to that, Paul emphatically repeats the disclaimer that "*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect . . .* " (v.12), "*I do not consider that I have made it my own*" (v.13). What is it that Paul aspired to so intensely yet had not been able to achieve?

We will copy the whole paragraph here for easier reference for the following discussions of specific texts: (verse numbers are retained for convenient reference)

> *[8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— [10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead* (*Phil. 3:8-11).*

The verb "gain" in v.8, " . . . *that I may gain Christ*" is a deliberate contrast to the

[311] "So the tense passes from perfect to present", Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, TNTC vol.11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 149.

noun "*whatever gain I had, I counted as loss*" (v.7), which epitomizes the radical transformation in his life. So he already gained Christ, didn't he? Yet Paul says right away that he **may**

> *be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (3:9).*

This is all what justification by faith means and does. Don't we always preach it as Christian assurance? How come Paul did not have the obvious assurance and could only say "*that I **may** be found in Him*…"? Same question for what he says next: "*I **may** know him and the power of his resurrection, and **may** share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*" (3:10). The only fact we would grant him for speaking reasonably is v.11, that he had not attained the resurrection from the dead. Yet even that is a sure promise, actually a present reality according to Paul himself elsewhere, for example, Romans 6:1-11 and Galatians 2:20. So why would he say "*by any means **possible** I **may***" attain the resurrection from the dead?

The answer must be found in the dynamic nature of faith. And this truth can only be fully understood in the dynamic context of the *simul.*[312] Everything Paul eagerly desires and God graciously promises (3:8-11) is *extra nos* in Christ. Paul

[312] Unless fully convinced that **Christian faith is to be exercised in a dynamic context of the *simul***, one might not be sensitive to discern the insights here, and this passage would be difficult as Paul shows "doubts" or "uncertainty" in faith. Commentators mostly notice the "'**not yet**' quality about the Christian life" here, Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, TNTC vol.11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 153; or the "***extra nos***" feature, particularly in verse 9, as Kent puts it: "In strong contrast (*alla*, but), to be found in Christ requires the righteousness that has its source not in man but in Christ . . .", Homer A. Kent, Jr. *Philippians*, The Expositir's Bible Commentary vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 141. Yet still the "uncertainty" of Paul's faith in this passage is a problem. Kent notes "he [Paul] has some **doubt** about it", *Ibid.*, 142, boldface emphasis mine. Martin ascribes Paul's **uncertainty** to the tensions between the present and the future, Martin, 153-4. Without the dynamic context of the *simul*, which is a Lutheran distinctive, "This is difficult to harmonize with his strong affirmation of faith elsewhere . . .", Kent Jr., *142*. Martin detects Paul's "ever present choice against a recurring temptation to rely on anything apart from Christ", Martin, 149. He attributes Paul's disclaimer in v.12 as "the tension between his [of Paul] present attainment and his aspiration of the future", *Ibid*., 154; and without directly confess the *simul*, he still has to acknowledge the further disclaimer in verse 13 "carries the important **dynamic** meaning of a recalling from the past into the present of an action . . . that the result of the past action is made potently present", *Ibid*., 155-6, boldface emphasis mine.

will not "possess" them like "*a righteousness of my own that comes from the law*" (3:9). The righteousness from God, the knowledge and power of Christ, the fellowship in His suffering and death and the hope of resurrection . . . are all *extra nos* in Christ.

So has Paul attained them? Yes and not yet.

As we have explained in chapter four, section three-5 (p.88) of this study, the *simul* actually describes two distinct states of the human nature in the same Christian. When he is in the state of the new man, everything he aspires is already his. But the old man, albeit abolished and destined to perish, still clings to him in his earthly life, always tempting him to gratify its lusts of flesh and ignore the "*surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus*" (3:8). The struggles and pursuits will go on until the flesh perishes. Now, the factor that determines which state (old or new) he will be in at a specific time and circumstance is faith. Faith alone connects him to the source of everything he needs that is *extra nos*—that is, Christ. It connotes a dynamic relationship with God. This explains the reason for all the subjunctive mood and disclaimers Paul uses. He is making the point as emphatically as possible, that this is a dynamic journey throughout the whole earthly life of a Christian. That is not a boring, fixed done deal at all.

Yes, a Christian is free and has everything in Christ. That is in a dynamic manner, though; that is, it is true every time he assumes the state of the new man; or in the language of Romans 8, when he walks according to the Spirit. Yet the old man of flesh keeps on tempting him. There is still the risk to go back to the old ways of life, and submit to the yoke of slavery again. As long as we live in this flesh on earth, we are still actively engaging in the battle of which the final victory has been destined; for we do have the sure promises that the new man will prevail, and the old man has been abolished. And more importantly, we know who calls us into the bat-

tle, and who empowers us to engage in it. That is the (*extra nos*) source of our faith.

4. *An Upward Focus and Sanctification*

This is the enlightening and encouraging message of Paul's paraenesis here: the presence of a divine, upward call. The transformed new life is granted with a new vision of a divine goal, and is entitled to a divine prize infinitely more valuable than Nobel Prize. That is what motivates him to "press on" (διώκω, a word for strenuous running in a race for the goal) with not only perseverance, but full enthusiasm. With all the toils, hardships and sufferings, plus the "*anxiety for all the churches*", Paul's life is under far more "*daily pressures*" than anyone among us, that he would exclaim "*Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant*?" (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-29) Yet nothing could hold him back from this one thing: "*But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead*" (Phil. 3:13). This is a highly focused life, with a divine vision that just cannot be distracted.

Interestingly, while this verse is often taken to mean "forget about the past and reach for the present", Paul deliberately chose two adverbs of place, not of time. The "behind" (*ὀπίσω*) does not mean "the past" time-wise, but spatially in the back.[313] "*What lies behind*" refers to certain issues that are no longer worth to be before him. They are not only things in the past, but things he still faces presently from time to time. They could even be daily occurrences. But in his eyes they are no more than "*rubbish*" (*σκύβαλα*, more precisely, "dung", in 3:8) to be forgotten and left behind. Similarly "*what lies ahead*" connotes not "present" in time, but things worth to be "in

[313] This Greek adverb can be used as a sequential (in time) adverb if context demands it, but the meaning would then be "after", which actually refers to later events with reference to the present; that is, a future event. Anyway, this adverb should in no way be understood as "past" in time. See Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody , MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

front of" him with the new perspective of the cross, things worthy of his "*straining forward*" to "*press on*" with a single, sharp focus. The choice of adverbs again enhances the dynamic nature of Paul's spiritual pursuit.

Now, this is obviously a pursuit for sanctification. Yet unlike some popular pietistic ideas about sanctification as nurturing an inner love for God and resisting temptations from the world,[314] Paul's pursuit is conspicuously outward and upward. The One who calls him, the source of his power, the goal and the prize are all *extra nos* in Christ. There is not a trace of hint for inner, self cultivation apart from what is in Christ. This diehard upward focus on Christ liberates Christians from, often unintended, straying into self-absorbed pursuits for spirituality, to which we are all prone.

What Paul presents here is not just the story of a private journey, a "personal testimony" or something. It is clearly outwardly focused too, and is definitely a powerful paraenesis for his listeners to aspire to and participate. Paul emphatically calls upon the whole Philippian church to respond to the same calling and pursue the same goal with him: "*Let those of us who are mature think this way . . .* "(3:15). Actually with respect to this transformation of mindset, Paul calls on all to " . . . *join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us*" (3:17). Yet even so, while this high calling is for everyone who believes, Paul does not take it for granted. He is very considerate for others who were proceeding at a slower pace.[315] He shows understanding to those who are not mature enough and ready for so radical a transformation: "*Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained*" (3:15-16). Here we can see Paul's

[314] A typical work is by Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

[315] This is reflected in Luther's insistence for discernment that not every neighbor is the same, as discussed in Section Five, Chapter Five of this study.

perspective on "maturity" in sanctification. What he means by "mature" (*τέλειοι*) in the context of 3:15 is **a mindset** — "*think this way*" — toward Christ, a walk of life in the direction of the high calling, which he encourages and urges. Yet for those who "*think otherwise*", who are less mature, what they need is not self-improvement, but just "*hold true"* to what they *"have attained*"; that is, don't act up and pretend to be more mature than you truly are. They are again comforted that it is God who "*will reveal that [mindset] also to you*". This is how Paul teaches about "progression" in sanctification. It is entirely upward and Christ-centered, free from any risk of self-centered cultivation apart from God's promises in Christ. We will persevere and make progresses because He who promised is faithful.

5. *Preaching Paraenesis as the Application of the Gospel*

In Philippians, comfort and encouragement are essential forms of paraenesis in preaching. Paul's examples of preaching paraenesis in this epistle show that these paraeneses must be firmly based on the gospel to truly build up faith and liberate the listeners in the spirit. More specifically, they are to be offered from the heavenly perspective of the cross. The discussions above also insist that paraeneses without the gospel of the cross will turn out to be wishful goodwill or empty pep talks. Those kinds of faulty paraenesis not only comfort no one in the long run, they eventually drive people back under the bondage of slavery, returning to their own works of the law for non-existent consolation, and ruin their faith. The difference made by the perspective from the cross is the difference between heaven and earth, supernatural and natural, divine and human.

Now, we can confidently say that the good news is truly "good", as it offers a heavenly perspective of things on earth, hidden from the eyes of the flesh. In this new perspective, what had been matters of critical importance in life might turn out to be of little relevance, and the eyes of our hearts are enlightened to see the most excel-

lent treasures of life previously invisible. The listeners will therefore be enabled to appreciate and treasure the gospel in deeper ways far beyond their natural senses could attain. **Preaching paraenesis in this sense is none other than preaching the gospel with personal, relevant and imminent concerns for the listeners**. It builds up their faith on a heavenly foundation, that is, *extra nos* in Christ; and liberates them from worldly concerns which cling to their lives like heavy burdens.

In the language of the *simul*, the preaching of the cross awakens the new man and empowers him to be actively in charge of the Christian's life here and now. Whatever might have been the causes for earthly worry and misery belong to the abolished old man, and are passing away after all. The new man, however, can rejoice in the Spirit unhindered by these issues. That is Christian freedom. When we approach the preaching of paraenesis from this perspective, there are no extra laws to be attached after the proclamation of the gospel, but the aspiration to fulfill the same law, which is God's will for our life in the first place. And thus, there is no such thing as an "impasse" in the Lutheran law-gospel paradigm of preaching.

Section Four Paraenesis for Good Works

It has been shown that paraenesis must be rooted in the gospel of the cross in order to build up faith and set free the spirit. Preaching paraenesis is but preaching the gospel with relevant concerns for the listeners. A sure grasp of this perspective also safeguards and liberates a preacher from common errors, such as religious platitudes and self-righteous heroism. Yet the discussions in the previous section are somewhat limited to paraenesis in the forms of comfort and encouragement, aiming at building up faith in the listeners. There are other forms of paraenesis, including exhortation,

admonishment, instruction and rebuke. In this section we will investigate how these forms of paraenesis work in the Epistle to the Philippians.

These forms of paraenesis share one common characteristic: they are all about Christian living. They are often the "application" part of a sermon, either calling for actions or dealing with practical, ethical issues in life. Simply put, they are about good works. The subject of good works is the main focus of the previous chapter in this study. According to the conclusions there, there are several key features of good works we should look out for from Paul's paraenesis in the epistle.

1. *Good Works Rooted in Faith*

Faith is actually the main point in the previous section. All types of paraenesis have to be rooted in faith. Yet it deserves special attention again when we start to talk about works. When good works are at issue, as we have argued in chapter five, a preacher must take extra caution to guard against "*this perverse leviathan*" of work righteousness, innately ingrained in the blood of the old Adam in us. That is Luther's insistence. Does Paul agree?

Let us take a look at the paraenesis Paul offers right after the Hymn of Kenosis, the main passage of gospel in the epistle. There he writes:

> *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (2:12).*

The literal meaning of every word is unmistakable. Doesn't this mandate "*work out your own salvation*" audaciously demand obedience and work righteousness? And that is how this whole Hymn of Kenosis (2:5-11) has been perceived and applied by many preachers! Without any doubt, the text shows us "the way of the cross" in unambiguous terms. Christ has sacrificed, infinitely, all His own privileges and advantages for you. Now it is your turn to respond. Many a preacher would

drive the listeners through such a thinking path, and provide various ways for them to "work out their own salvation". So my response to Christ is (mis-) construed to be heroic, self-willed sacrificing myself for the cause of the gospel.

This is reflected in many popular sermons and lyrics of Christian hymns. For a typical example, the first stanza of the classic gospel song "*The Way of the Cross Means Sacrifice*" by Ada Rose Gibbs (1865-1905):

> *The way of the Cross means sacrifice, As to God you yield your all.*
> *To be laid on the altar, the place of death, Where fire will surely fall.*
> *[Refrain] 'Tis the way of the Cross, are you willing for this?*
> *What does bearing the Cross mean to you?*
> *You who've given yourself, your all to God! To God are you wholly true?*

The next 3 stanzas are of the same ethos. There are noble exhortations for self-sacrifice and submission throughout, yet conspicuously, we have to say, without the gospel as the empowering impetus. Listeners are urged to make a self-willed determination to pay the cost and follow Jesus.[316]

In similar ways, many sermons built on this passage share a very common "punch point", which goes something like this: "Look, Christ has given up so much for you! Now what have you given up for Him?" There is an unspoken mindset that we ought to do better to make it a fairer deal with Christ, which is utterly a merit mentality.

These sermons and lyrics may be invigorating for a short while, but in the end they often lead to heavy-heartedness in the wake of the realization of our own inadequacy: "It is too hard to be a good Christian!" And thus the despair: "It is only for those who are really spiritual, not for me."

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[316] A similar example is "*China of the Missions*" 宣教的中國, a popular contemporary Chinese hymn written by Xiao-Min: " . . . *through stormy times, my determination is unyielding evermore. I will preach, preach the name of the Lord, and swear to prevail, . . . I walk forward with a mission to wake up the sleeping China, Even I bleed, I will never look back . . .* ".

The cause for all these predicaments is the misplaced gospel, or the missing of it altogether. Jesus might be presented, yet often only as **a model of cross-bearer** demanding our imitation; not preached as the **One Who has already born our sins and shames** on His cross. Even He is preached sometimes at some point, this good news is not made the last word of the sermon or lyric, and its efficacy is canceled by the law-dominated conclusions. In a word, we have often missed the most precious message in this Hymn of Kenosis and turned it into a demanding set of rules and standards to be conformed to.

Now a slight digression: the message of a text depends on the contexts. We should acknowledge that there might be good, right and biblical contents in those sermons and lyrics. The problem is that the gospel is not properly preached to arouse faith. In cases where such a sermon is supplemented by gospel-rich liturgies; or a hymn such as "*The Way of the Cross Means Sacrifice*" is sung as a response to a sermon preached with substantial gospel content; they can serve their positive, efficacious roles as parts of the holistic worship services. The otherwise law-dominated messages therein can be turned into edifying paraenesis. After all, the third use of the law is actually the same law, yet preached to the regenerate.[317]

Now back to our problematic verse "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*". It does not stand by itself. Not only is it exhorted directly after the Hymn of Kenosis which extols the perfected redemptive grace of Christ that no one can contribute any bit more; it is also followed immediately by another verse bursting with gospel dynamics with a causal conjunction "for": "*for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (2:13).

Verse 13 is a clear expression of the gospel, that what we ought to do and failed,

[317] See the discussions of chapter five, section four-4, pp.112-4.

God has done for us. It reveals that everything concerning our salvation is motivated and carried out in actual action by God alone, who chooses to work in and through our will and our hands. It is in this sense we are exhorted to "*work out"* our own salvation.

Therefore, this paraenesis of good work is fundamentally based on the gospel, and thus rooted in faith. While an impossible law if taken out of context, it is in fact a precious paraenesis, not only assuring us our salvation, but also assuring and encouraging us that we are spiritually empowered to do what we "will" to do. Strictly speaking, we are "willed" by God passively to work; yet also we indeed actively aspire to the work. It is "*for His pleasure*" we do it, yet at the same time we do it freely with perfect willingness. Obedience is no longer a requirement to meet against our will, but an effortless act of our own will. In Luther's words,

> *Therefore, if we recognize the great and precious things which are given us, . . . our hearts will be filled by the Holy Spirit with the love which makes us free, joyful, almighty workers and conquerors over all tribulations, servants of our neighbors, and yet lords of all.*[318]

Thus, paraenesis differs from the law in a crucial aspect: the laws (commandments) "*show us what we ought to do but* ***do not give us the power*** *to do it*";[319] while paraeneses motivate and **empower** us with the gospel promises and comforts, fill us with the Holy Spirit, and exhort us to do what they "command" us to do with joy and freedom. This insight applies to all exhortations, entreaty and ethical instructions in this epistle. For instance, the entreaty for unity *"standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel"* (1:27) is motivated by the gospel promises " *This is a clear sign . . . of your salvation, and that from God*" (1:28). Or

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[318] *LW* 31: 367.

[319] *LW* 31: 348.

in the following example, we aspire to these ethical instructions with freedom and joy

> *. . . whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (4:8).*

because of the immediately preceding paraenesis of the promises in prayer, which embraces and wraps up the whole content of the epistle:

> *. . . do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (4:6-7)*

Back to the text "*work out your own salvation . . .*" (2:12), we are enabled to do good works of our own salvation "*for it is God who works in you . . .*" (2:13). Now the command of working the good works are no boring platitudes. They are specific instructions of God against our nature of the old Adam, as will be discussed next; and are to be received as honor and worked out "*with fear and trembling*". This is faith expressed in reverent worship. We treat them with "*fear and trembling*" because they are gifts most precious and honorable beyond our highest reverence possible. In extreme antithetical to the terrified conscience by the law against our sins, this godly fear liberates with utmost, unspeakable joy. Doing good works with joy and freedom, this is what paraenesis rooted in faith offers!

2. *An Outward Focus of Paraenesis for Good Works*

There are more to the text that "*it is God who works in you, both to will and to work*" (2:13); in order for you to "*work out your own salvation*" (2:12). It is crucial to identify what kind of work it is that we are to do in working out our own salvation. Again, without further contexts, we could imagine and invent a wide variety of religious piety to work on; most likely seeking spiritual devotions inside ourselves because it is our "*own salvation*". Yet Paul leaves no room for such wild imaginations.

He continues without interruption: "*Do all things without grumbling or disputing*" (2:14). Is that all the worth of our salvation?

Of course our salvation is inestimably precious. It is priceless. Yet it is God who perfected it in Christ. Our works contribute absolutely nothing to our own salvation. To "*work out your own salvation*" can only mean good works as a result of our salvation, when God works in us to motivate and empower us. And the work Paul specifies immediately must be highly significant. "*Do all things without grumbling or disputing*". It would be taken as an ordinary ethical platitude if read in isolation by itself. But there again is the following context:

> *that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world (2:15).*

At first glance, this verse seems to be a call for personal holiness. Yet how are we to achieve this status of blamelessness? It is set forth in the previous verse (v.14) explicitly: not by means of any personal disciplines for inner virtues or morality, but through "*Do[ing] all things without grumbling or disputing*"! The cause-effect relationship of these two verses is made unambiguous by the connecting phrase at the beginning of verse 15: "*that you may . . .* ".

It sounds incredible that we "*may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish*" just by not complaining and quarreling. Yes, this is actually an important insight about paraenesis for good works. There should always be an outward focus. While paraenesis for building up faith must be focused upward, paraenesis for good works has to be outward focused; as the most important among our good works is to "*love your neighbor as yourself*". In the language of the Two Kinds of Righteousness, the upward focus avails us with the first kind, alien righteousness; and the outward focus empowers us to work out the second kind, proper righteous-

ness.

Loving our neighbor is translated here into working together with others, even someone we don't really like or agree with, in love, understanding and forgiveness; and working out disagreement without fighting and justifying ourselves. To God, that is of higher priority than many personal disciplines we deem spiritual and do in solitude. We can find other paraeneses in Philippians with clear outward focus, such as

> *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (2:3-4).*

Or,

> *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (4:2-3).*

3. *Self-Denial — the Way of the Cross*

Still, it sounds a bit flippant that we can become "*blameless . . . and children of God without blemish*" by just doing things together in church without complaining and quarreling. We must see that what Paul is trying to get at here is a very serious subject: self-denial.

Simple as it seems, the paraenesis of not focusing on oneself is profoundly life-transforming. The old man of flesh is incorrigibly self-centered, self-conscious. He knows nothing else but self-gratification and self-justification. He does everything for his own interests, but never a thing to look "*to the interests of others*" (2:4). It is impossible for the old Adam in me to "*do all things without grumbling or disputing*". To overcome my old flesh, I need a new, different life, a "new man" in me to "deny" the old Adam of his dominance in my life. And it involves conflict and suf-

fering. That is why Christ must come down in the flesh, and die on the cross for us. Only through faith can we be transformed and receive the power of His resurrection to "will and work" for God's pleasure. Paul has indicated this way of the cross even before he presented the Hymn of Kenosis:

> *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have (1:29-30).*

The teaching here is in perfect agreement with Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. We may immediately relate it to the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John 17, where Jesus prayed for the unity of the disciples and the future church,

> *. . . that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me . . . (John 17:21).*
>
> *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (John 17:23).*

This well-known prayer contains the same kind of paraenesis we just saw here in Philippians; that when we practice self-denying love in unity, we are witnessing to a "*crooked and twisted generation*", among whom we "*shine as lights in the world*" (2:15).

There is another teaching of Jesus that is more relevant, which we have already discussed in the previous chapter of this study. In the Sermon on the Mount, the famous (or, notorious) "*love your enemy*" passage ends with the seemingly impossible "*be perfect*" commandment (Matthew 5:44-48). The radical commandment "*You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*" is actually fulfilled every time we practice the teaching " *. . . Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you".* For as we love our neighbor unconditionally, we are reflecting the true heart and essential nature of God who "*makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends*

rain on the just and on the unjust". So it is fitting that "*you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven*". This is exactly what Paul says here in Philippians 2:15,

> *. . . that you may be* ***blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish*** *in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world . . .*

Like the passage here in Philippians, both the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and the High Priestly Prayer in John 17 also contain paraeneses for a lifestyle of self-denial, leading to genuine discipleship and unity. It is understood that the gospel had not been made explicit at the time Jesus uttered these teachings, because His passion on the cross had not happened. However, both Matthew and John passages strongly anticipated the passion in contexts.

These paraeneses are all solidly based on the fullest content of the gospel where a dynamic faith becomes active through love. Many of them are directives for lifestyle throughout this epistle. They are necessary because we forget the gospel everyday. Knowing that I should "*look not only to [my] own interests, but also to the interests of others*" (2:4), I could still fight for my interest when tempted at times. That is why relevant paraeneses must be preached at all occasions when the Word of God is proclaimed. Yet because "*it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (2:13), these paraeneses are by no means legal demands for conformity for us Christians. As explained in chapter five, they liberate us by turning our reliance on Christ in faith, and directing our works toward our neighbor in love. There is always an outward focus; it never turns inward for self-improvement. Instead, it denies the old man of flesh in us of his demand for self-gratification. Being totally voluntary in practicing such lifestyles of self-denial, the gospel freedom is preserved everywhere in these paraeneses, dynamically revealing the unspeakable joy and peace hidden behind the cross. This is self-denial in practice, the true way of the

cross, the true Christian love and true freedom of a Christian.

Examples of Self-Denial

In the middle of the Epistle, Paul mentions two personalities: Timothy and Epaphroditus. This is not just a casual mention of acquaintances. Their introduction is again highly significant in relation to the very theme of self-denial, and thus powerful paraeneses for the Philippians.

Paul was sending Timothy to Philippi to meet with them, because the Philippians needed to see a living example of the love Paul is teaching about. Timothy is a fitting candidate: "*For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned* ***for your welfare***" (2:20, emphasis mine), even when others "*all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*" (2:21).

Epaphroditus, on the other hand, was sent by the Philippian church to serve Paul in his imprisonment. Unfortunately, he fell seriously ill, to the point of near death, when he was with Paul. Yet instead of becoming self-pity for his own plight, his only distress was his illness caused the church to worry for him. He " . . . *has been distressed because you heard that he was ill*" (2:26)! That was why Paul must send him back, "*that you may rejoice at seeing him again*". He is another example of sacrificial love to serve others and self-denial for the cause of the gospel.

These two personalities are not only good examples of sacrificial love for their neighbor, they are related to the Philippian church in very special ways; that is, the people in church know them personally and are actually the receivers and "beneficiaries" of their self-denying love. Thus their appearances in the epistle serve as highly effective paraeneses.

A Tender Admonishment

We can find very few cases in the epistle, if any, of rebukes. In chapter four, Paul mentions two women who were at odds to each other while serving in the church,

and it became public that Paul learned about it. There, the paraenesis becomes more personal: "*I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord*" (4:2). This could have become an open rebuke that would put them in shame. Yet Paul immediately follows it with the commendation that these two women "*have labored side by side with me in the gospel*", and their names "*are in the book of life*" (4:3); making it a tender admonishment to reconcile with each other, and a call for the whole church to uphold them. We know Paul is not always shy in rebukes. He could be very harsh like in Galatians or 1 Corinthians. The reason for the "partiality" is likely what we have discussed in chapter five, section five-3, that there should be discernment in freedom; because not every neighbor is the same. He might confront the "wolves" firmly and deal with the "sheep" with much patience. In both cases, "*This is the command of love which would harm no one but would serve all men"*,[320] even at the cost of our own interests. As we have argued previously, this is the genuine self-denial in practice.

Hardly Any Inward Focus at All

Now, it is noteworthy to say it again that, all the paraeneses in this epistle are either upwardly focused on Christ in faith, or outwardly focused toward other people in love. True Christian freedom that is only found in Christ is thus preserved. It would be hard pressed to find any exhortation for cultivating "inner life" for oneself of any sort. Could the scarcity of self-disciplines in this epistle validates the reason we have argued for in chapter five, that these works are specific in purpose and should be kept minimum? This is indeed possible.

Admittedly, not every epistle in the New Testament is so rich in paraeneses, and the stipulations of "law" are only specific and pointing throughout this epistle. The

[320] *LW* 31:374.

Apostle evidently exercised discernment to write to different readers with sensitivity. Depending on the purpose and circumstances, each book in the New Testament has its specific emphasis and characteristics. Philippians might be one of the most "positive" and "tender" ones. However, it is definitely more "sermonic" in style, length and contents than many other epistles. Examining the whole epistle for the uses of paraeneses is still a safer and more balanced way than "cherry picking" selected passages and verses from the Scripture.

Section Five Summary of Paraenesis in Philippians

We have studied Paul's Epistle to the Philippians to verify Luther's theological distinctives for paraenesis preaching, chiefly extracted from the study of his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*. Most of these distinctives checked positive in this epistle. Overall, this whole epistle is full of paraeneses. They are clearly based on the assurance that Christians are justified before God through faith. Examining the epistle reveals that a proper grasp of the gospel always helps turn our eyes to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This *extra nos* focus is dynamically applied and reflected in life as the true way of the cross, offering us a supernatural perspective to all things. Under the cross, there is no room for any boasting in and of myself. I have nothing to show off, to offer or to sacrifice before God, who has graciously given me everything I don't deserve. I can do nothing but deny my own merits and ascribe all glory to God. This new perspective, an ever-refreshing realization through our daily life experiences, always activates a genuine faith which is essential for us to preach, to receive and to act on all types of paraenesis.

Furthermore, the cross not only arouses our faith in turning our eyes to Christ in

times of trials and temptations, it also energizes love through faith and avails us the power and willingness to do a wide range of good works for our neighbor. In a world where "love" is wedded with self-fulfillment, the way of the cross always liberates us from self-centered worldviews and empowers us to love our neighbor selflessly. This is "faith active through love" which leads to Christian freedom.

So this is the simple guideline to paraenesis preaching—we preach paraenesis whenever it is most appropriate to build up our faith in Christ and promote good works towards our neighbor; always keeping in mind that whatever the specific types or goals of the paraeneses are, the gospel freedom is to be preserved in the end.

Section Six Assessing Luther's Paraenesis in Light of Philippians

A preacher of the Word must always be ready to offer paraenesis in a hurting world. People need them day in and day out, while sufferings of illness, injustice, broken relationship, bereavement, career failure or other tragedies in life are inevitable and unpredictable. If a preacher does not intentionally and carefully do paraenesis from the perspective of the cross, he is unprepared and would, by his human nature, put the listeners in harm's way—offering useless platitudes at best, and unknowingly demanding works of the law in worse cases. Thus it would be interesting to examine some paraeneses given by Martin Luther and check to see if he does them according to what we just learned from Paul in Philippians.

In one case Luther wrote a letter to console a widow, who lost her husband just 8 months ago; and now her son also died of an illness that at first seemed nothing serious.[321] How could Luther, or any preacher, console a woman going through such brutal heartbreaking tragedies?

"*It is natural and right that you should grieve*", Luther expressed his empathy for her grief, at the same time he assured her that God did too. He was testing to see "*whether **we** can fear and love Him in sorrow as well as in joy*".

While Luther chose "we" in this generalization of the First Commandment, he addressed the grieving woman directly with "you" in the most crucial and impactful words of this letter of consolation:

> *. . . that you acknowledge the gracious and good will of God and that you patiently bear this cross for His sake, **remembering in fervent faith what a cross it was that He Himself bore for you** and for all of us, a cross in comparison with*

[321] Martin Luther, "To Catherine Metzler," in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Vancouver, Regent College Publishing: 2003), 72-73.

which our crosses are light or as nothing.[322]

These words direct her to see and feel the tragedy from a heavenly perspective, where God the Father endured a greater grief for the suffering and death of His Son on the cross. Other than that, Luther did not speculate on the reasons behind it. Rather, he points out to her the surest fact that her son, being "*a good Christian who had a blessed departure from this wretched world*", is now with the Lord Christ. This should not be taken for granted, as some other people would really mourn for their children because they "*die a shameful death and go to the devil*", like David for Absalom.[323] This is a brief yet thoughtful pastoral paraenesis rich with gospel comforts, even for the most distressed soul.

Another example is his letters to his own aging and ill father in his hometown Mansfeld, three months before his father's death.[324] While in Wittenberg himself and unable to travel due to the adversaries against the Reformer, Luther expresses a son's earnest longing for being with his parents:

> *It would be the greatest joy to me if it were possible for you and mother to come hither, which my Katie and all of us beg with tears that you will do.*[325]

Yet what concerns him more is their faith:

> *In the meantime I pray from the bottom of my heart that our Father, who has made you my father, will strengthen you . . . so that you may receive with joy and thanksgiving* ***the blessed teaching of his Son****, our Lord Jesus Christ, to which doctrine you have now been called and* ***to which you have come out of the former terrible darkness and error****; and I hope that* ***his grace, which has*** *. . .* ***begun his work in you, will guard and complete it to the end*** *of this life and to*

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[322] *Ibid.,* 73, boldface emphasis mine.

[323] *Ibid.*

[324] *Ibid.,* 30-35.

[325] *Ibid.,* 32.

the joyous hereafter of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.[326]

We can see a powerful operation of law and gospel beneath the heart-warming affection of a son. This emphasis must be rare for a letter of consolation to one's own ailing father. Hoping to "*become a participant of your faith, temptation, consolation, and thanks to God for his holy Word*",[327] Luther further comforts him that his sufferings in life are but the marks of the cross:

> *God has already sealed this teaching and faith in you and has testified to it by such marks as that you have suffered much slander, abuse, obloquy, mockery, scorn, hatred, and odium for his name's sake, as we all have done. These are the* ***true marks of our likeness to the Lord Christ****, as Paul says, that we may be like him also in future glory.*[328]

To encourage his father to keep praying in faith despite his weakness, Luther assures him of the faithfulness of Christ in His promises:

> *Let your heart be strong . . . in your trouble, for we have yonder a true mediator with God, Jesus Christ, who has overcome death and sin for us and now sits in heaven . . . awaiting us so that when we set out we need have no fear or care . . . He has such great power over sin and death that they cannot harm us, and he is so heartily true and kind that* ***he cannot and will not forsake us*** *. . .* ***if we ask his help without doubting. He has said, promised, and pledged this****.*[329]

And finally, seeing life and death from the new perspective of the cross makes all the difference:

> *I commend you to Him who loves you more than you love yourself. He has proved his love in taking your sins upon himself and paying for them with his blood, as he tells you by the gospel.* ***He*** *. . .* ***has prepared and accomplished everything most surely****, so that* ***you need not care or fear any more****, but only*

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[326] *Ibid.,* 33, boldface emphases mine.

[327] *Ibid.*

[328] *Ibid.*, boldface emphasis mine.

[329] *Ibid.,* 34, boldface emphasis mine.

keep your heart strong and reliant on his Word and faith . . .[330]

Furthermore,

> *Our departure from this life is a smaller thing to God than my journey would be from here to Mansfeld or yours from Mansfeld to Wittenberg.*[331]

Luther ends the letter with the remark that "*I hope that your pastor and preacher will point out such things to you in faithful service*"; and that the motive for him to also write these thing in the letter was just "*to ask forgiveness for my bodily absence*".[332]

Two years later in a Table Talk, Luther talked about this letter:

> *I thank God that my father died a godly death. Before his end I wrote him a letter of consolation. The parish clergyman read it to him and asked whether he believed what he had heard. He answered: "Of course! If I didn't believe it, I'd be a knave."*[333]

Can such an affectionate letter full of human feelings be so penetrating with law and gospel, and at the same time so encouraging from an uncompromising perspective of the cross? Yes, that is what we find in many of Luther's writings and sermons. Obviously Luther has a deep & firm conviction that **any meaningful comfort could only come from the cross, where the saving grace of God in Christ is manifested**. He never hesitates to offer these candid words with due sensitivity, because he knows they are not his goodwill but the supernatural grace from God. This notable feature stands out in a vast majority of Luther's letters, table talks and sermons, particularly in his paraeneses for the purpose of comforting people. He evidently put to practice what he teaches in *The Freedom of a Christian* and elsewhere, whenever consolation

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[330] *Ibid.*, boldface emphasis mine.

[331] *Ibid.,* 35.

[332] *Ibid.*

[333] *Ibid.,* 36.

and encouragement are called for.

Conclusion—the Word of the Cross

"*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*" (Gal.5:1).

This "paraenesis" of Paul to the Galatian church is our conviction, that preaching Christ faithfully always liberates the listeners, particularly from the "*yoke of slavery*" due to the old Adam's merit-mentality in us against faith in Christ. Based on this conviction, we have studied Luther's treatise of 1520 "*The Freedom of a Christian"* for insights to overcome the alleged "impasse" of the Lutheran law-gospel preaching paradigm. The objective is to help preachers preach paraenesis confidently.

With the help of the theological insights and doctrinal distinctives discovered from "*The Freedom of a Christian*", and confirmed and verified by reflections on the New Testament epistle of Paul to the Philippians, we can safely conclude now that paraenesis is the effect and fruit of the gospel. It exists and is efficacious because of the gospel. When people need spiritual counsels, comforts, admonitions and rebukes, or instructions and guidance; we preach the gospel in sensible ways that is readily applicable to their real life. That is all about paraenesis preaching.

To sum it up, we insist that paraenesis, despite the purported "impasse", is always necessary in every event where the Word of God is preached. Without paraenesis, the proclamation would be reduced to theoretical lectures of theories remote from the listeners' real-life experiences. A preacher should thus boldly and confidently **"***preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort*" (2 Tim.4:2), in offering paraeneses for the teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness, so that the listeners "*may be complete, equipped for every*

good work" (2 Tim. 3:16).

At the same time, we uphold it more ardently that paraenesis ought always to be preached in a manner that it liberates the listeners to enjoy the gospel freedom, instead of opening a back door for the "*yoke of slavery*", that is, the merit-based works of the law, to make a comeback.

On appearance we are faced with a dilemma—the so-called "impasse". Should we unapologetically present the law for our listeners to keep after all; or should we offer them nothing other than the pure gospel to set them free from the bondage of law? By human logic it seems that there has to be some kind of compromise, a "balance" between antinomianism on the one end and legalism on the other. Luther, however, in *The Freedom of a Christian* offers us a higher perspective, rooted in faith and perceived through the cross in love. Set forth by Christ on the cross, this self-denying way of the cross avails us with a new worldview and a totally transformed value system. This supernatural perspective is precisely what we need to maintain both of our insistences without any compromise. It results in a solid theology for paraenesis preaching. As a result, we can always be empowered to preach the gospel freedom in every encouragement, exhortation, admonition, instruction or rebuke.

This study further shows that this theology for preaching is by no means philosophically sophisticated. None of the relevant theological insights for paraenesis preaching is profound or hard to understand. They are all basic elements concerning the doctrine of justification, and can be understood straightforwardly. A grasp of the true significance of justification through faith alone in the context of the *simul*, where all contents and effects of faith are *extra nos* and dynamic, is all we need in order to preach paraenesis freely and confidently without any unnecessary concern for a return of the yoke of slavery. There should not be any impasse.

When paraenesis is thus preached, the focus of the listeners' spiritual pursuit is directed upward, looking to Christ in faith; and outward, serving their neighbor in love. Liberated from self-reliance and self-gratification, they actually increase in the keeping of the law, yet with joy and freedom. This is none other than sanctification in a biblical sense—that a person's life is set apart solely for the Lord to do whatever pleases Him. Whereas self-disciplines with an inward focus do have a place in paraenesis, their role and purpose is very specific and limited; that is, to subject the flesh to the Spirit for freedom from selfish pursuits and carnal lusts. And their extent of practices should be restricted to what is necessary for fulfilling that role; that is, just enough to achieve the specified purpose; in order to avoid preoccupation to the works themselves, leading to self-righteousness.

Checking and examining the paraeneses administered in the epistle to the Philippians, which is a sermon Paul preached to the church; all these insights of Luther's theological distinctives are valid and applicable. Christian freedom is preached with power throughout the whole epistle, in precisely the very spirit of these theological insights.

All the findings summarized above seem to be ordinary. They require neither mysterious spiritual recipes nor intricate systems involving complicated philosophy or metaphysics. So, why is all the fuss about the "impasse" in the first place? Why does it bother so many scholars, theologians and preachers?

The truth is, we, both the preachers and the listeners, are fundamentally human. We in ourselves are incorrigibly self-centered, and we walk in the opposite direction to that in which God is calling us. We are thus often disconnected from the source of freedom and power. The "secret" Luther offers to resolve the problem of the alleged impasse is no secret at all; yet we do not like it in our innate selves. In other words, the impasse would have not even existed if we all heeded God's call to begin with.

This call from above is God's wisdom and God's power, which Paul describes as "*the word of the cross*":

> *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God……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……but to those who are called, …Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18, 21, 24).*

The impasse bothers us because we are human beings preaching to human beings. More candidly, we are sinners ourselves while preaching to sinners; as we are currently still in the state of the *simul* even though we are justified in Christ. Often times we would rather stay in our own old selves than abide by the word of the cross. Our worldly wisdom does a disservice here, as Luther points it out in Article #24 of the *Heidelberg Disputation* in 1518:

> *Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.*[334]

Underneath our human wisdom and our fondness for the works of the law is the fundamental problem of sin, which is reflected in our natural mindset, and our theologies (of glory). We are still shallow in appreciating the taste of joy and freedom available to us through justification. Hence Luther's simple yet distinctive theological insights, which impacted the Christian world powerfully during the Reformation, are exactly the help we need today for overcoming this root problem and its resulting impasse.

A remark made by Professor John Pless quoted below succinctly catches the spirit of the gospel freedom in the word of the cross:

> *Lutheran theology does not start with notions about human freedom and the potential (great or small) that human beings have. Theologies that start with as-*

[334] *LW* 31: 41.

sumptions about human freedom end up in bondage. Lutheran theology begins with man's terrible bondage to sin and ends up with the glorious liberty of the Gospel.[335]

In fact, all theologies can be classified into only two categories. The irony is that those presume human freedom and potential to begin with will end up in bondage to sin. These "theologies of glory" are popular because they are human wisdom natural to the old Adam in us. The only other option is embracing the reality of our helpless bondage to sin in the first place. This "theology of the cross", albeit hidden to the natural human wisdom, is the only way leading to true freedom through self-denial.[336]

Pless further exegetes the bondage to sin in terms of being held captive to death and condemnation:

> *The bondage to sin is not a slight defect that can be corrected by appropriate self-discipline. Neither is it a sickness that can be cured by the appropriation of the medication of regular doses of God's grace.*
>
> *Sin is enmity with the Creator and carries with it God's verdict of guilt and a divinely imposed death sentence. To be a sinner is to be held captive in death and condemnation.*
>
> *The distance between God and humanity is not the gap between infinity and the finite but between a holy God, who is judge, and man, who is the guilty defendant.*[337]

As sinners in ourselves condemned to death, what we need is neither self-improvement nor moralistic prodding. We need to be saved, acquitted and liberated from the death sentence. It is possible only when we are not in ourselves but in Christ. This is why justification is absolutely crucial, both in our personal ex-

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[335] John T. Pless, *Luther's Small Catechism: A Manual for Discipleship* (St.Louis: Concordia, 2019), 119.

[336] Cf. Martin Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation*, *LW* 31: 41-42.

[337] Pless, *Luther's Small Catechism: A Manual for Discipleship*, 119.

perience of forgiveness and freedom, and our proclamation of God's saving grace.

Luther's teachings in this study have been very revealing: although we are justified through faith once for all, we never get over with justification and move on to something superior, say, progressive inner sanctification or some other advanced disciplines; as long as our flesh remains. In the state of the *simul* on earth, we root all our spiritual quests in God's alien righteousness, received passively through faith for justification before God; and we actively do righteous works to serve our neighbor. All these practices are in a dynamic manner with upward and outward focuses, and they do not depend on our own perfect-ness. Such selfless focuses simplify our spiritual life and free us from concerns, worries and preoccupations about our own progress or level of perfection. Luther summarizes his teachings in the *Treatise*:

> *We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor…. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love.*[338]

This dynamic, selfless lifestyle is always motivated and empowered by the gospel of the word of the cross. It always brings about freedom and joy throughout our existence on earth. This is what we preach in paraenesis.

[338] *LW* 31: 37.

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