

PREACH

the Word

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The Gospel of Sanctification

Previous issues of this newsletter have spoken of the critical importance of preaching the law and the gospel explicitly. When Lutheran pastors hear this, our knee-jerk reaction may very likely be to think only of what these two basic messages of the Scripture have to say about the sinner's justification. And that's unfortunate.

According to Lutheran theology, God's law and his gospel address the sinner's sanctification, just as surely as they do his justification. To illustrate this, a brother has shared a little teaching tool which I have found helpful. I hope you will, too.

This business of being a Christian affects **two areas—justification and sanctification**. To accomplish his will for us in each of these two areas, God has revealed **two powerful messages—law and gospel**. If God's plans for the sinner are to be realized, each of these two messages must speak to each of these two areas. That gives us a grid consisting of four quadrants:

| | JUSTIFICATION | SANCTIFICATION |
|--------|---------------|----------------|
| Law | 1 | 3 |
| Gospel | 2 | 4 |

Now insert appropriate verbs—strong ones—into each of the four quadrants of the grid; verbs that describe the contribution law and gospel, make in each area. Think first of the area of the sinner's **justification**. What's the contribution of the law here (Square 1)? It convicts; it curses; it damns. Move down to Square 2. What's the contribution of the gospel in the area of the sinner's justification? It pardons; it acquits; it saves.

Now move over to the area of the Christian's sanctification. What does the law have to contribute here (Square 3)? It directs; it guides (the third use of the law). Right here we have reached a critical point, an important and logical transition point when we preach sanctification. What do we tell God's people after the law has directed them to some change God wants to see in their lives?

Do we say: "Brothers and sisters, God has showed us what he wants to see in our lives - now do it, for love of God." or "This morning God has called us to be grateful. Now get grateful." or "God saved you by his grace, and now he expects you to perform." or "Jesus did a lot for you; now out of gratitude for your forgiveness, you should strive to obey his will." or "If you really love Jesus, shouldn't you do this for him?"

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PREACH
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The Emotional Message of Your Sermon

Every time you preach, you speak in two different languages at the same time. One is the language of the mind; you could call that the **intellectual message** of your sermon. That's what your words say; that's the carefully thought-out message of your sermon manuscript (or of your expanded outline, if you preach from that).

The other is the language of the feelings; call that the **emotional message** of your sermon. These two simultaneous communications don't necessarily say the same thing. In fact, they may—and often do—say opposite things, in which case the message of the words is not merely diminished by the contrary message of the feelings, it's pretty effectively cancelled out. When the intellectual and the emotional modes are at variance with each other, people instinctively

believe the emotional message, and disregard the intellectual.

As your hearers listen to your sermon, they're listening not only to your words, but to your tone of voice. This is not to say that sinners are converted by my reading ability or my sincerity. But it recognizes that in pity and in power God put his gospel into flesh and blood messengers, whose assignment it is to communicate clearly and sincerely.

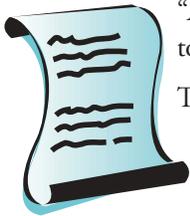
Does the pastor sound bored with what he's telling God's people, or excited? Does a note of awe creep into your voice as your Christmas sermon discusses the awesome miracle of the incarnation? A constant danger threatening the preacher is to choke the wonder out of the Christian faith, thereby reducing it to a series of propositions about God.

What does the sermon say about how the pastor thinks of people? Does it appear to talk down to them? Or does it make clear that the pastor sympathizes with his hearers in their daily struggle against their selfish nature and an unbelieving and unsympathetic environment? Do we come off as interested primarily in sound doctrine, or in helping broken people find the help only Christ can give them? Give your sermons a personality check. Make sure they announce, "Lord, I love you, and I love these people!"

Remember: What comes across to the outsider is not your sensitized conscience or your doctrinally correct sermon, but your joy in Christ and your love for Christ's people.

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"Back to the Sources!"



"Ad fontes!" Augustine used to say. "Back to the sources!" I was delighted recently when a brother wrote to ask for help in introducing Hebrew exegesis into pastoral conference agendas.

There's no mistaking the attitude Martin Luther had about keeping the rust off our Greek and Hebrew skills. He said, "As dear to us as is the gospel, so diligently must we hold on to the languages. We will not retain the gospel long without them." Remember that everything God has told us—about himself and about us, about his plans for us and about his gifts to us—is contained in the vocabulary and the syntax of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

So what difference does this make when you're preparing next Sunday's sermon? It means finding (or stealing) some time (preferably on Monday morning) to translate next Sunday's text from the original—battling unfamiliar vocables, identifying verb forms, noting unusual word order. (A Hebrew sentence, for example, normally begins with the verb; if it doesn't, the writer may be trying to tell you something). This is time-consuming, but what else can give you the confidence to announce from the pulpit, "This is what the Lord says"? Beginning your text study early in the week gives you time to meditate on next Sunday's sermon text, and also time to practice talking about it in sick visits before you talk about it from the pulpit. Even a little time, some small effort done to God's glory, will receive his blessing and rewards in your faith and preaching.

On the hill you were taught to begin your text study with the primary resources: text, lexicon, grammar, and concordance. You don't move on to the secondary resources (commentaries, dogmatic notes) until you've done everything you can with the primary ones. Think yourself empty before you read yourself full. August Pieper used to point out that if a pastor moves on to the secondary resources too soon, he becomes dependent on them, risks losing his ability to have an original thought, and becomes a second-hander. Augustine's rule is worthy of any Lutheran preacher: *"Ad fontes!"*

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You've heard all five of these "sanctification appeals." They all have a touch of steel; they're all basically law-oriented. (They are what a conference brother of 40 years ago used to call, "Giving people some evangelical heat.") All five downplay the primary use of God's law (as a mirror). All five ignore the devastating activity of our old Adam. (You don't tell a starving Rwandan: "You look skinny. You should put on a few pounds.") All five lend themselves to misunderstanding. Worst of all, all five ignore the gospel's specific contribution in that critical fourth quadrant. A brother who wrote in response to an earlier issue of this newsletter commented: "Time and again, I not only see the gospel twisted into a third-use-of-the-law sanctifying motivator, but I repeatedly hear the law presented as something to cajole, nudge, and modify the behavior of our people toward piety—hence pietism."

Again, think of a strong verb which describes what the gospel contributes to the Christian's sanctification. The gospel **empowers** the Christian to live for God. It **enables** him to be what God has called him to be. It **equips** him for the sanctified life.

The same act of God (Christ's death and resurrection) which created a **new status** for us also created **new life** in us. The only nature our parents could pass on to us was their own sinful nature. But Christ broke the stranglehold that old nature had on us from birth. Through the gospel in word and water, the Holy Spirit created a new nature in us. In place of our built-in rebellious nature, he planted a new nature in us which says, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). Furthermore, the

Spirit is constantly at work strengthening that new nature, enabling us boldly to say no to our old, self-centered nature. "Our old self was crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6:6).

Our sanctification appeal, therefore, is not, "Try harder." "You ought to do better." Listen instead to Paul: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). "Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

One example: Paul did not tell the Corinthians: "The Christians in Jerusalem are starving. Oughtn't you do something about it? After all, look at how God has blessed you." What Paul did say was: "God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work . . . He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed . . . You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. . . ." Did you notice Paul's choice of verbs? His basic appeal is not the imperative: "You should..."; not the subjunctive: "Let us . . ."/ "May we . . ."; but that magnificent indicative: "You can. You can trust God to make it possible."

The Augsburg Confession says, "Because through faith the Holy Ghost is received, hearts are renewed and endowed with new affections, so as to be able to bring forth good works" (XX:29).

A gospel-motivated sanctification appeal will, therefore, not direct people to look within themselves

for the resources to live sanctified lives. To kindle a sanctification response in a Christian, Lutheran theology does not suggest rubbing love and gratitude together like two sticks. Instead of directing people to their own vacillating resources (as the Pietists did), Lutheran theology calls upon people to **trust what God has done and will do** to produce changes in their lives.

God is absolutely committed to supplying everything we need to live the sanctified lives he has called us to live. "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). It's because of that promise that you and I can approach God's saints not with "You ought to . . ." but with "You can. . . ."

"Trust God to equip you for the task to which he calls you." It's God's promise and power that justify Walther's perceptive comment: "*Der Christ ist ein Optimist*" (rough translation: "The Christian is an optimist"). By way of contrast, can you imagine a commanding officer telling his troops before the battle, "We'll never take that hill." With Paul we can say, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

To summarize, then: our sanctification appeal is not so much "Do!" as it is "Believe!" By faith we accept not only God's offer of pardon from sin's guilt; we also accept God's promise of freedom from sin's power. We can tell God's people: "Be what God has made you!"

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Lord, give me what you ask of me, and then ask of me anything you want."

St. Augustine

Body Language

Itzhak Perlman, world-famous Israeli concert violinist, once remarked, “People only half listen to you when you play. The other half is watching.” It’s pretty generally agreed that a speaker’s non-verbal behavior has more bearing on communicating his feelings and attitudes than do his words.

Audiences not only hear performers—they see them. Congregations not only listen to preachers—they watch them. Whenever we step into a pulpit, our bodies go along to play their own pantomimes, to tell their own stories—whether we like it or not. And this is not bad, except when our words say one thing and our bodies say the exact opposite. When this happens, the effect on the hearers is usually one of apathy, as one message cancels out the other.

There are three possible relationships of a speaker’s body to his overall message:

1. His body may accompany him into the pulpit like a passive, inert passenger going along for the ride. The speaker speaks as though he were nothing but a head.
2. A speaker’s body may accompany him like a mischievous boy intent on distracting the hearers’ attention. There is bodily agitation, but it doesn’t support or strengthen what the speaker is saying. Some of you can remember how John Kennedy’s index finger

used to keep chopping at his lectern. Years ago, a student asked me one day after class, “Do you realize that you keep rocking back and forth from one foot to the other?” (I hadn’t realized that, and was grateful to my young friend for telling me about a distracting habit.)

3. A speaker’s body may bring to his speech the whole weight and force of his personality. The sermon is then not only a talk about religion—it’s a live demonstration of it. Members of the body are then instruments of your thoughts, just as surely as your words are (lifting your eyebrows, shrugging your shoulders, leaning forward or standing erect, clenching a fist or pointing a finger, smiling, frowning).

Maybe you’re a laid-back person who ordinarily tends to be undemonstrative when you speak. But when you talk about the curse God calls down on sin, shouldn’t your expression reflect the terror you feel at the thought of falling under the awful judgment of God? And doesn’t a note of additional earnestness and urgency have to creep into your voice at that point in your sermon?

When you preach God’s law, your ordinary face will do. But when you speak about the amazing love that led the Savior to trade places with us—living our life perfectly, dying our

death innocently—the concrete mask has to break. The lines around your mouth have to soften. A smile may appear. Remember: People only half listen to you; the other half is watching.

WORTH A PONDER OR TWO

“The preacher who habitually consults his manuscript doesn’t have his greatest problems in the pulpit. When writing his sermon, he doesn’t have to fight for the most simple and direct expression, or for the most closely knit sequence of particulars. The result is an address which he could never repeat except by reading—and one which the audience could never remember except by rereading.”

Caemmerer,
Preaching for the Church



May the Spirit touch your heart, your hand, and your tongue!

John C. Jeeke