

# THE ETHIC OF LOVE SCRIPTURE AND LUTHER



BY  
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Dedicated to

My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

with special thanksgiving to and for

Mr. Homer Bates, my stepfather,

Mr. Jim Cullen, my brother, mentor, and friend,

The Rev. Dr. Dick Reinisch, one of my college professors, a mentor, colleague, and friend,

Mr. Art Linemann, a mentor, colleague, and friend,

Rev. Bill Stuenkel & his wife Gail, dear friends

Dr. Bill "Karp" Karpenko, a mentor, colleague, and friend,

Rev. Langbecker, my confirmation pastor,

Mrs. Shirley Bates, my mother, and Debbie Cullen & Kelly Dollarhyde, my sisters,

ALL MY STUDENTS (who in a very real sense have been family),

and

All the pastors and all the members of the various congregations I have been privileged to serve.

I thank all of you, and I thank God for all of you. You have all influenced my life, my theology, and my ministry more than I can say.

Philippians 1:3-8 (NIV)

I thank my God every time I remember you.<sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy<sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,<sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.<sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

*Note: All Scripture passages in this manuscript are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.*

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## 1. WHAT IS LOVE?

### *Love*

*Love is not always being happy with someone or liking and/or approving of everything a person does. Love is not so much a feeling as much as it is a commitment resulting in action. In love I accept you as a person of unique worth and importance. I accept you as you are, and I accept you regardless of your past and regardless of whether or not you ever change. I accept you because you are; because you are YOU and that YOU is special!*

*In my love for you, however, I commit myself to you in such a way that I invite you to change. I invite you to change not so that I will be able to love you more (you have all my love now and you will not be able to lose it), rather it is because I love you that I invite you to change, to grow, that you might more fully experience all the beauty and the uniqueness of the YOU that God created and redeemed you to be. In all this, whether you change or not, or even if you should change in ways that I perceive to be bad, I promise to love you. I commit myself to you, to be here for you and to be whatever you need me to be. I promise to reflect back to you your own best self-image.*

*Do I love you? Yes, YES, I love you! (Bill Cullen, 1979)*

Society's concept of love is of great concern to me. If we are to understand Christianity, we must understand love for "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). It is only through a proper understanding of love that we can truly understand the Christian faith. Christianity is not primarily a religion of doctrine. First and foremost, it is a religion of love/trust relationships.

***First and foremost, Christianity is a religion of love/trust relationships.***

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor. 8:1).

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn. 13:34-35)

In our society the word "love" has become trite. It is used in a variety of ways, seldom with any depth of commitment, and all too often it is used as an excuse for injustice. We use the word "love" to describe our feelings for a food we enjoy. "I love ice

cream.” We use the word “love” to talk about movies we see and actors or actresses we appreciate. We use the word “love” to talk about sexual experiences. We use the word “love” to talk about money and possessions. None of these uses of love carry with them a deep sense of commitment. We love the above-mentioned things, experiences, or even people because of what they do, or because of what they can do for us. If they stop doing for us, our commitment to them becomes fickle and is long gone.

The Greeks had at least four words for love: *storge*, *eros*, *philos*, and *agape*. *Storge* is a kinship, loyalty type of love that one might have for one’s family, one’s alma mater, or one’s country. It is a possessive love. We love something because it is ours. *Eros* is a sensual type of love. It is a love for someone or something because it pleases one or more of our five physical senses. When people of our society today use the word love I believe they are most commonly using it in an *eros* (sensually gratifying) sense. *Philos* is a brotherly or sisterly, close friendship type of love. It usually has some basis in mutuality, in a give and take relationship. *Agape* is an unconditional, in spite of, type of love. It is a commitment type of love that has its basis in decision, that is, in an act of the will. *Agape* is the word for love that is most frequently used in the New Testament, being used 280 times. *Philos* is used 41 times in the New Testament.

***“Love is life.  
And if you  
miss love,  
you miss  
life.”  
Leo Buscaglia***

*Storge* is used 3 times, and *eros* is not used at all as the New Testament writers talk about love. It might be interesting to keep track of the number of times one hears the word love in a one- or two-week period of time, and to identify which of the types of love most frequently is being used in our society. One might then compare the percentages of

these findings with each usage of the word love in the Scriptures. If I am correct in my assumption that when people use the word love today they are using it in an *eros* sense, I find it interesting that that is the only type of love that is not mentioned in the New Testament.

None of these four types of love are bad in or of themselves. They all have their place in our lives. However, if we are to understand Christianity, we must understand what God intends when the New Testament writers made use of this word. I believe a major problem of Christianity today stems from misunderstanding the biblical concept of love and misusing the word love. How can we advocate Christianity if we do not understand its most basic element? How can we expect anyone inside or outside the Body of Christ to be attentive to words which are no longer saying anything concrete and that no longer convey God's intent in the use of the word? How can God and His glory be made known when we do not distinguish, even within the Church, the elements and motives which create the basis for our beliefs and therefore our actions?

Dear Friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 Jn. 4:7-8).

We, the Church, boast of having Christ—of having love. Yet, if we fail to understand what love is, if we fail to know the person of Christ in our midst, we can do more harm than good. Both the whole law and the gospel are summed up in love.

*Love is what God expects and demands of us—Law.*

***“Both Law and Gospel are summed up in love.”***

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Mt. 22:37-40)

Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the

fulfillment of the law. (Rom. 13:10)

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. (Jas. 2:8)

*And love is what God does for us—Gospel.*

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

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 Jn. 4:9-10)

Love has become a term to express vague generalities. Clothed in emotions, the word love has become a way to avoid something concrete. John Elderidge in his book *Wild at Heart* writes: “Satan has distorted our use of love – changing focus from *agape* to *eros*. The New Testament does not use *eros*, our society uses it almost exclusively – ‘I am not ‘in love’ with you anymore.’ Our language confuses us.”<sup>1</sup> This is not the love that is found in the Scriptures where we read:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. If anyone has material possessions and sees another in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with action and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

In the Scriptures, love is very concrete. It moves, it acts, it is real. In love, Jesus heals (Mt. 14:14). In love, Jesus feeds the multitudes (Mt.15:32). In love, Jesus washes His disciples’ feet (Jn. 13:1-11). Love implies a commitment—not in general terms, but in personal and

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<sup>1</sup> John Elderidge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secrets of a Man’s Soul*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2006, p. 45.

specific terms. Love is the basis for the relationship between God and His creation. It is also to be the basis of the relationship between each “you” and each “me” in the world.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. (Jn. 13:34-35)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal. 5:6)

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (Jas. 1:27)

Leonard Sweet writes:

For Martin Luther, one of the greatest theologians of faith in the history of Christianity, faith was a new kind of relationship that Jesus makes possible. This doesn't mean there are no cognitive components to faith, of course. But for Luther, it was faith's “relational capacity—uniting the believing sinner with Christ—that faith justifies.” The gospel is more than our salvation from sin. The good news is our incorporation into the life of God. We have been raised with Christ so that we “might walk in newness of life” and be raised to new levels of relationship.<sup>2</sup>

Faith is more than holding the “right” beliefs; it is holding the “right” (that is, the “least of these”) hands. We are judged by the world not on the basis of how “right” we've gotten what we believe but on how well we're living it—on how we love God and people.... The test, according to Jesus, is that his disciples are known not by how well they defend orthodox propositions, but by how well they “love one another.”<sup>3</sup>

In Christendom, particularly in the denomination of which I am a member, there is tendency to get caught up in having right doctrine, when what really is important is in being in right relationship. Right or correct doctrine provides us with knowledge “about” God, right relationship involves us in an experience of God. God has created and redeemed us, not for the sake of having a set of correct doctrines, but for the sake of relationship. I am not suggesting

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the GodLife Relationship*, WaterBrook Press, 2004, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

that doctrine is unimportant (1 Tim. 4:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:15). Doctrine can be very important, but doctrine is “a” means. It is not the end or goal.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Rom. 14:1-4)

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. (1 Cor. 8:1)

Doctrine tends to objectify God, presenting objective truth “about” God. These objective truths are important, but they are not Christianity. Christianity is subjective, personal. Christianity is relational and experiential. In teaching doctrine there is always the temptation to do eisegesis (reading into Scripture our perceived beliefs), rather than doing exegesis (reading out of Scripture) where Scripture speaks for itself.<sup>4</sup> For Luther one’s personal relationship with God and understanding of Scripture always must supersede church doctrine. In regard to the authority of the Pope and of the papacy to determine doctrines that were to be binding, unquestioned, and unexamined Luther wrote:

He wishes his articles, his decrees, and his laws to be regarded as articles of faith or commandments of God, binding on the consciences of men, because he holds that his power is by divine right and is even to be

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<sup>4</sup> It is important that people hear and respect the church and its doctrines. It is important that Christians acknowledge and respect the Spirit’s guidance, and the scholarship that has proceeded them in the formation of these doctrines. Yet, individually and collectively, people approach truth with biases and blind spots that cause them to misunderstand or deny aspects of the truth. There needs to be an on-going, healthy, creative dialogue between doctrine established by a “community of saints” and personal experience and interpretation (Acts 17:11). Through such dialogue the Spirit will provide individual and communal correction and will enable all to more closely approximate God’s absolute truth (Phil. 3:12-16).

preferred to the commandments of God. What is even more horrible is that he adds that it is necessary to salvation to believe all these things.<sup>5</sup>

Unless I am convicted by Scriptures and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God, I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me, here I stand. Amen.<sup>6</sup>

Once again to quote Leonard Sweet:

The first Christians didn't proclaim a creed or a statement of faith; they didn't demand assent to a list of facts; they proclaimed the Cross; they proclaimed the Resurrection; they proclaimed the coming kingdom of Christ. They proclaimed Jesus. Faith is not vested in creeds, or invested in institutions, but vested in relationships.

Western Christianity is largely belief based and church focused. It is concerned with landing on the theology and doctrine and making sure everyone else toes the line. The Jesus trinitab, in contrast, is relationship based and world focused. It is concerned not so much with what you believe as with whom you are following. It is less invested in maintaining and growing an institution and more invested in Jesus' passion for saving the world.

We have yanked ourselves from the soil of relationship with God so we can do the work of tidying things up. We are now sanitized and correct, factual and precise, but tragically bereft of relationship. We are disconnected from our source so that we have become sterile. We may be doctrinally correct, but we have become spiritual cadavers.<sup>7</sup>

This book will address the following question: "According to Luther and according to the Scriptures, what is the nature and role of Christ in regard to living out the ethic of love in a Christian life, and what does it mean for Christians today to live this ethic of love?" In answering this question, I will seek to demonstrate that both in the Scriptures and in Luther's theology

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<sup>5</sup>Theodore G. Tappert, Trans. & Ed., *The Book of Concord*, "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope" 1537, Fortress Press, 1959, p. 320.

<sup>6</sup> Bergendoff, Conrad, *The Church of the Lutheran Reformation: A Historical Survey of Lutheranism*, Concordia Publishing House, 1967, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the GodLife Relationship*, WaterBrook Press, 2004, p 6.

Jesus' role is primarily, although not exclusively, dispositional in character (Christ in us and we in Him—Jn. 15:4-5), as opposed to being objective in character (His merely being our model or example). This is significant because it is through recognizing the dispositional character of Scripture's and Luther's ethic of love that not only are we taught what love is, but also that we most fully experience love, and that we become empowered to love.

Luther, while being influenced by certain men (primarily Augustine and perhaps Staupitz and Stapulensis) was a biblical theologian, and it is the Scriptures that give credence to Luther's thought. Likewise, I pray that I and all Christians, while studying the works of significant people such as Luther, will not blindly accept their works uncritically, but will subject all thoughts to the Scriptures, which are to serve as the source and norm for all Christian understandings and doctrines.

***We value Luther and our Lutheran doctrine, but just as the Bereans subjected Paul's teaching to the Scriptures so must we always subject our doctrines and teachings to Scripture.***

In writing this book I have included a lot of Scripture passages which for the most part I have not merely cited by reference but have purposefully written out. I did this because I want you the reader to *read and ponder the Scriptures* as you read this book. There are a number of passages of Scripture that are used repeatedly throughout the book. This is done intentionally as I want them constantly to be in your thoughts as you mentally dialogue with me and with God in your reading. Read this manuscript as a dialogue between Jesus and myself for in a very real sense that is what it has been for me. The Bible passages cited are Jesus' part of the conversation. For me not to include them would be to discount Jesus' voice to me and perhaps to you. There are also a lot of quotes from Luther, various theologians, and other individuals

***Read and ponder the Scriptures as you read this book.***

adding their voices to the conversation. Finally, at the end of each chapter there are a number of questions which invite you to join the conversation, adding your voice. I pray that you will challenge and critically examine the thoughts expressed in this book and that you will let the thoughts of this book, especially the Scripture passages (Jesus' voice), challenge you. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (Jas. 1:22)

**For Reflection:**

1. The author states "Christianity is not a religion of doctrine; it is first and foremost a love/trust relationship." Do you agree or disagree? Explain. If you agree, what do you believe is the proper role of doctrine within Christianity?
2. Where do you see *eros* love in our society? ...*storge*? ...*philos*? ...*agape*? Which do you believe is most prevalent? Explain.
3. React to and discuss the author's statement: "Both the whole law and the gospel are summed up in love." (p. 7)
4. As you reflect on the Luther quote on page 10, bottom of the page, what, if anything, does Mark 7:5-13 have to add to our conversation or dialogue? Explain.
5. As you reflect on the Sweet quote on page 11, what, if anything, does Luke 10:38-42 have to add to our conversation or dialogue? Explain.
6. React to and discuss the Scripture passages the author uses to support his position. Which passage did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
7. What, if anything, in the chapter do you most appreciate and are ready to embrace? With what, if anything, do you most disagree or would like further clarification or discussion?

**Reflections and Learnings**  
**Complete as Appropriate**

Something that excites me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something that challenges me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something I would question \_\_\_\_\_

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I most want to remember \_\_\_\_\_

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A difference this will make in my life \_\_\_\_\_

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## 2. GOD'S LOVE FOR HUMANITY

### *Broken*

*Why am I the way I am?  
Why do I do the things I do?*

*In so many ways I am so small, so low,  
Sin seems to possess so much of my being,  
Time and again temptation is in my path –  
knowing it to be wrong and a mockery to the life I profess;  
I stumble and fall.*

*So often I seem to be playing at being a Christian,  
when it is convenient,  
when it will attract attention and praise to myself,  
Are my sacrifices real or are they a show?  
Do I take the easy way, and when no one is looking, surrender easily to the ways of my flesh?*

*I am so possessed with pride and a gazing at myself,  
self, self, it all leads to sin,  
Yes, chief of sinners that is I,  
and, yet it is for this "I" that Christ did die.*

*Dear Jesus, You are bigger than I and my sin,  
Jesus, You suffered, yes, really suffered, and died for these sins.  
I am sorry, my Lord.*

*Lord, I am stubborn and weak – left to myself I shall pursue the ways of my past.  
Lord, I reach out, I cry out for Your strength and Your Spirit.  
Jesus, these were Your promises and in Your name I claim them as mine.*

*So many times I've come to You and so many times reverted back to my past,  
I need broken, I need You.  
Break me, fill me, strengthen me, give me purpose, and give me new life.*

*Thank You, Jesus,  
my Jesus.  
Lord, I believe!  
Help my unbelief.  
Lord, through You I love,  
help me to truly love.  
Lord, in You I live,  
help me to live through You.*

*Thank You, Jesus,  
my Jesus.*

*Bill Cullen  
March, 1977*

## HUMANITY APART FROM GOD'S LOVE

Perhaps it is best to begin by establishing humanity's state apart from God. Luther's theology, in accordance with the Scriptures, has always depicted people in themselves as sinful and incapable of pleasing God. Philip Melanchthon in "The Augsburg Confession" writes:

Man possesses some measure of freedom of the will which enables him to live an outwardly honorable life and to make choices among the things that reason comprehends. But without the grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit man is not capable of making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lust from his heart. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God, for Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14, "Natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God."<sup>8</sup>

In ourselves, by ourselves, we are separated from God, and we are lost, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). We have no hope, and we have no excuse.

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (Rom. 2:12-16)

We don't have to look very hard or very long before we see ourselves as sinful—the little white lie, the number of times we exceed the speed limit, the unkind words and impure thoughts, the feelings of envy and jealousy. If we add our sins of omission, the failing to do the good we ought to have done, our sins multiply exponentially (Jas 4:17).

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<sup>8</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959, p. 39.

Even our civil righteousness or conformity is tainted with hedonism or self-interest, i.e., the idea that all things considered, it would be better for “me” if I acted in a particular way. I must confess that much of the “good” I strive to do is more often than not tainted with at least some degree of self-interest. All too often I want to win another’s love and/or admiration, rather than simply respond to people because of a recognized need. Such righteousness cannot be considered as merit for ourselves or in ourselves. We were created for an “obedience that comes from faith” (Rom. 1:5) and sin (*hamartia* – falling short) is any deviation from it.

*God created people in His image in order that we might enjoy a special love/trust relationship with Him that no other aspect of creation could. Distrust (sin) broke that relationship. Jesus demonstrated His love by becoming one of us, by suffering, dying, and rising to win back our trust in His love through which our love/trust relationship is restored—God's creative and redemptive purpose.*

Everything that does not come from faith is sin. (Rom. 14:23)

And without faith it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11: 6)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:8-10)

God’s created people are special. He created people in His image, both male and female (Gen. 1:27). He created people special, in His image, in order that we might experience and enjoy with Him something that the rest of creation could not – a perfect love/trust relationship. A love/trust relationship where we trust His love for us and where we respond in faith to that love with loving/trusting obedience. Anything that does not flow out of a love/trust relationship with God misses the mark of God’s intention and it is sin in that it misses the mark.

In Genesis 2:18 God did find one fault with His creation which He quickly fixed. The one fault was “It is not good for man to be alone.” The love/trust relationship that Adam and Yahweh shared was not meant to be kept just between Adam and Yahweh. It was also meant to be experienced and enjoyed with others of Adam’s kind, with other human beings. The significance of this sometimes gets overlooked or dismissed in the church. Sometimes we get almost apologetic for the social character of our congregations (i.e., people attending events, including Bible studies and even worship, for the relationships they experience there). This is sad. We need not apologize for the social character of Christianity. God created us humans as social beings. God created us and God redeemed us for relationship. In experiencing and enjoying our relationships, we are merely fulfilling both God’s creative and His redemptive purposes (1 Jn. 1:1-4). Sin broke our relationship with God, and sin breaks our relationships with one another as well.

Adam and Eve’s original sin really is a sin of distrust. In love God told Adam and Eve that they could eat of any fruit in the garden, except the fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The serpent came to Eve suggesting that she try the forbidden fruit. Eve at first refused, telling the serpent that God had told them that they were not to eat the fruit of this tree. The serpent at this point cast suspicion on God’s character and love by suggesting that God was holding out on humankind and that she should not trust God’s love. Eve chose to believe the lies of the serpent. Looking out for herself (trusting in herself, rather than trusting God), she ate of the forbidden fruit and then offered some to Adam, who also chose to eat it.

Adam and Eve’s original sin was not the eating of the fruit. The eating of the fruit was merely a result of their sin. Adam and Eve’s original sin was not trusting in God and in His love for them. It was in believing that God was holding out on them. It was their distrust in God’s

love that broke their relationship with God. In distrust of God, Adam and Eve focused upon themselves: on their supposed needs, on their wants, on their desires. This focusing upon themselves caused a break in their relationship with God, and it caused them to lose or to miss the purpose for which they had been created in God's image—enjoying a special love/trust relationship.

Just as it was for Adam and Eve, the sin of people today is really a sin of distrust. As Adam and Eve's distrust broke their relationship with God, it is our distrust in God's love that breaks our relationship with God (it is distrust that also breaks our relationship with one another). It is our distrust of God and His love, His wisdom, and His power that leads us to focus upon ourselves, upon our wants, and upon our desires. This is why it is only trust in His love (incarnate in the person, revelation, and work of Jesus Christ) that will restore our relationship—God's creative and now His redemptive and restorative purpose.

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

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (1 Jn. 3:16)

Apart from God we recognize a void—an emptiness in ourselves. We recognize the fact that there is something more, something beyond ourselves, but we do not know its source. We run about blindly, searching for a more meaningful and fuller life, but we do not know where to look, nor can we identify that for which to look. We know there is something beyond ourselves, but in our fallen state, being separated from God, we cannot identify it as God. God is the only one who can fill this void. He created us with the idea that He would be the essence of our lives. Only with Jesus as that essence can life realize its potential.

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (Jn. 10:10)

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phil. 1:21)

St. Augustine has said that a person's soul will be restless until he or she finds rest in God. We find our rest in God through faith. The

question is "How then do we acquire faith?" We do not come to faith in a vacuum. Our faith is a work of God's love. We come to faith only through the touch and revelation of the Holy Spirit. Our faith is merely a response to God's coming to us through the incarnation, through Word, through Sacrament.

***"Our faith is a work of God's love. We come to faith only through the touch and revelation of the Holy Spirit."***

To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (Jn. 1:12-13)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.... From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. (Jn. 1:14-16)

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known. (Jn. 1:18)

Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent." (Jn. 6:29)

No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:3)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, discounting its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2)

Faith is not something that can be commanded. We can tell someone to have faith, and they may even desire to have faith, but that will not enable them to have faith. Faith is not a

***Faith cannot be commanded; it is not born through law. Faith is born as love is demonstrated and proclaimed. It comes through hearing and experiencing Gospel!***

response to command (Law), with a focus upon our activity and what we are to do. Faith is a response to God's activity (Gospel). It is awakened or birthed as God's gospel in Jesus Christ is proclaimed and made known. We come to faith not by doing, but by hearing and receiving. In a very real sense faith is birthed in us as the Holy Spirit impregnates us with

the living Word. "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Rom. 10:17, see also 2 Thes. 2:14)

God's love is clearly and powerfully seen in His taking the initiative, His coming to us, filling our void in the person and act of Jesus Christ.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:6-8)

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us. We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us ... We love because He first loved us. (1 Jn 4:7-19)

Faith is birthed and grows not merely by knowing the written Word, by knowing *about* Jesus. Faith is birthed and grows by knowing the Word made flesh, by actually experiencing

Jesus. This is why faith must be a work of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Cor. 2:10-16). It is the Spirit that give us an experience of, with, and in Jesus.

My favorite Hebrew word is *yada* or *yadah* meaning “to know.” A *yada* knowledge is more than a knowing about. You may have heard the phrase “he knew her in the biblical sense” or read in Genesis 4:1 “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived” (KJV) meaning that there has been a sexual intercourse. The Hebrew word used here is *yada*, however, *yada* is also the word the Hebrews used when they would talk of their relationship with God (Dt. 34:10; Is. 48:7), not implying a sexual relationship, but a very personal and intimate relationship which was meant to birth and strengthen faith. They didn’t just know about God. They knew/experienced God. We get this same sense in the story of the woman at the well in John chapter four where after the woman shares with the towns people her personal encounter with Jesus. Jesus then spends another couple of days with them, and John recounting the story writes:

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” (Jn. 4:39-42)

Jesus doesn’t want us to simply know about Him. He wants us to have an intimate experience of and with Him. This happens as the Spirit births in us the person and personality of Jesus to which Paul can write:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal. 3:26-27)

It is as we increasingly come to experience (yada—know intimately) the Word become flesh that we increasingly are transformed into His image.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

We love because he first loved us. (1 Jn. 4:19)

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 Jn. 3:1-2)

My own “yada” with Jesus probably began in my freshman and sophomore years of college. I was a Christian long before that. I had known “about” Jesus and I truly believed what I knew about Him. If I had died, I would have enjoyed salvation and eternal life with Him. However, whereas I had known about, and believed what I knew about Jesus, and I loved Him for it, I had not known Him in an intimate, “yada” way. I knew about Him without really knowing Him intimately, and without daily enjoying His empowerment. (I must confess that I still don't “daily” experience His empowerment. Not because His empowerment isn't present, but because I am such a dimwit and take my eyes off of Him – Heb. 12:2; Mt. 14:25; 2 Pe. 1:9).

I was active in church. I attended worship every Sunday and was always in Bible class. I was president of my church youth group my junior and senior year of high school. During my senior year of high school, I decided to go to Concordia College in Portland, OR to begin my studies to become a Lutheran pastor. However, although I was religious, I was seeking to live

my life “for” Jesus, rather than letting Jesus live His life “through” me. In many ways I was like those to whom Paul refers in Romans 10 and Galatians 3 where he writes:

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Rom. 10:2-4)

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Gal. 3:1-5)

I trusted in Christ for salvation, but not for sanctification and ministry.

During my college years God, through His Spirit, not only taught me about Jesus, but actually drew me into a deeply personal relationship with Him. I began to memorize large portions of Scripture which Jesus would then use to daily enter into dialogue with me. I became involved with various mission efforts both in Portland (primarily hikes for the hungry), and then in my junior and senior years at Concordia, Fort Wayne, IN (the biggest of which was helping to start an inner-city ministry called “Soul Found”).

Being involved in missions and ministry helped me grow in *yada* in two ways. First, it put me where Jesus was and is – namely, on the front lines. It is a lot easier to get to know Jesus and to see Him act on the front lines of mission efforts than it is while sitting on some sofa watching some mindless show on TV. Second, it made me dependent upon Him (Jn 15:5).

I remember being asked to be a part of a summer mission team through what was then Lutheran Youth Alive, now known as Youth Encounter. “I” was going to do great things “for”

God. The problem was after the first week, “I” had run out of ideas. It was then that I began to become dependent upon God and began to experience His strength in my weakness.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

### **GOD IS LOVE**

Luther’s theology revolves around the truth that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as depicted in Scripture alone. His “solae” have been heralded as the basis of Lutheran thought, and by Lutherans as well as many other Christians, as the truth articulated in the Bible. We are saved not because of ourselves, but because of the person and work of Jesus, the Christ. And we experience salvation solely through having faith—responding with faith to His incarnate love, manifested in His life, death, and resurrection, as proclaimed in/through Word and Sacrament.

***Grace alone***  
***Faith alone***  
***Christ alone***  
***Scripture alone***

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God—not of works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:8,9)

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.... ( Mt. 28:19)

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Cor. 11:26)

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (1 Thes. 2:13)

...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15).

In order to truly and fully live we have to die to ourselves, which in a very real sense we do daily as we richly experience the effects of our baptism. As our "old self" is daily/momently drown, Jesus daily/momently resurrects new life, His life in us, and as new creations

***Baptism =  
daily death  
& daily  
resurrection.  
Yah!!!***

we can and do again know and enjoy relationship with Him and empowerment through Him.

Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it." (Mk. 8:34,35)

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Rom. 6:3-4)

I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. (1 Cor. 15:31)

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Cor. 4:10-11)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. (2 Cor. 5:17)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from

God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:7-11)

God's love, incarnate in the person of Jesus, reaches out to us to restore the relationship with God that was broken in the Fall because of human distrust. Faith is a response to this love that is initiated by God's action in history, and more personally in our own experience, and that is communicated to us through Word and Sacrament. Faith enables us to experience and enjoy the relationship God has worked to restore. Distrust broke the relationship. Grace satisfies God's justice and reaches out to us to restore the relationship by birthing and awakening faith in God as He acts for us and enables us to enjoy our new or "renewed" relationship.

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

Luther has said,

If I were to paint a picture of God I would so draw him that there would be nothing else in the depth of his divine nature than that fire and passion which is called love for people. Consequently, love is such a thing that it is neither human nor angelic but rather divine, yes, even God himself.<sup>9</sup>

Scripture in 1 John 4:8 comes right out and says "God is love," and in verse 16 it says, "God is love and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." Jesus is God, and He is love incarnate.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God .... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth .... From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another. (Jn. 1:1,14,16)

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. by Robert Schultz, Fortress, Philadelphia, 1966, p. 115.

This is a love which seeks us out and shares itself with us as Christ shared Himself. “God demonstrates His own love in this: While we were all still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

God “showers us with His own being.”<sup>10</sup> He gives us what He is. For Luther, God’s sharing of Himself is the highest expression of the fact that God is God. It means that the attributes of God are by their very nature creative and are not only His own and remain in Himself, but are also shared with people, with His body the Church.

### **GOD MEETS HUMANITY IN LOVE**

God’s love manifests itself in giving, in His unconditional giving of Himself. God’s love is “...not receiving but giving, freely without hope of gratitude, independent of man’s attitude toward Him, that is a completely different way than natural to men.”<sup>11</sup>

God’s love is not an “if” love, nor a “because” love, rather it is an “in spite of” love, an *agape* love. God loves us in spite of the fact that at every turn we have ignored, rejected, and insulted Him with our faithlessness and lack of love. As we previously read, “But God has shown us how much He loves us: it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Love is best known or experienced through the act of giving, “For God so loved the world He gave” (Jn. 3:16), and then John writes “This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us . . . .” (1 Jn. 3:16) Christ gave completely of Himself. By His giving and only by His giving, we are now acceptable to God.

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (Jn. 14:6)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 116

from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:1-4)

### **GOD IN LOVE FREES HUMANITY**

God, who is righteous and who demands righteousness, has decided not to keep His righteousness to Himself. In love, in Jesus, He comes to us who are unrighteous and shares His righteousness with us that we might become the righteousness of God. In fact, not only did Jesus give us His righteousness, but He also first took our unrighteousness with its consequences upon Himself.

God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice. (Rom. 3:25)

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man. (Rom. 8:3)

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. (Phil. 3:8-9)

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant .... In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness .... So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. (Heb. 9:15,22,28)

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world" (1 Jn. 2:2).

This taking of our unrighteousness demonstrates both the seriousness of our sin and God's sense of justice. God's holiness could not simply overlook sin. At the time of creation, He stated there would be consequences for sin. In order to be just He needed to be faithful not only to us, but to Himself. He needed to follow through with what He said. Sin was and is serious stuff, and justice demands that someone pay. In Jesus, God doesn't simply sweep our sins under the carpet or ignore them. In Jesus, God demonstrates both His love and His sense of justice by Himself paying the very demanding penalty for our sins.

***We have a secure righteousness because our righteousness is not found in our merit, but in His being.***

Luther writes, "The righteousness of God' must not be understood as that righteousness by which a man is righteous in himself, but as that righteousness by which we are made righteous by Him."<sup>12</sup> Our righteousness is not our own, but a righteousness which is given by God to those who through faith receive His righteousness for them.

The words "he was accepted as righteous" were not written for him alone. They were written also for us who are to be accepted as righteous, who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from death. He was given over to die because of our sins, and was raised to life to put us right with God. (Rom. 4:23-25)

This righteousness is an act of love. God, in love, in Jesus, comes to us and asks only that we do not reject His love. Not only does God give us the means of salvation, but He also provides us with the means to accept the gospel without coercing us against our wills.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (Jn 1:9-13)

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. (2 Thes. 2:13)

God has sent His Holy Spirit (often referred to as the Spirit of Love by those within the Church) to teach us (Jn. 14:26), to sustain us in the faith (1 Jn. 3 :24) and to serve as a guarantee (2 Cor. 1:22). God, in His love, provides us with every feasible opportunity to respond to His love by receiving Him in faith, a faith birthed or awakened by His love. Yet, in His love He also gives us the freedom to reject Him. Matthew 12:31-32 indicates that the only sin which will not be forgiven is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

As I understand it, this blasphemy is rejecting the Spirit's work of faith in our lives. In love God risks the chance of us rejecting Him. He seeks of/from us the true worship of our heart.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Ps. 51:16-17)

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23-24)

We might picture God to be like a loving father who is climbing a mountain with his child. The father reaching the top extends his hand and strives to take his child's hand into his own so that the child might safely reach the summit with the father and share in the father's glory. However, the child in an act of self-will can reject the Father's hand. We can respond to

our Heavenly Father by allowing Him to take our hand (note: we don't take His hand—a work on our part, but He takes our hand—pure grace) or we can in egotistic pride rely on and trust in ourselves and in what we ourselves can do. Here the analogy begins to break down. The child climbing the mountain may be able to reach the summit on his or her own. As Christians who have experienced God's love and have come to realize our own very real limitations, we know that only in His love can we know the true abundance of life, both now and eternally. Trusting in ourselves can only lead to our destruction.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (Jn. 14:6)

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a person remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

***Faith is not something we create, but something that is born in us—born of God.***

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:15-25)

Even our faith must ultimately be understood as an act of God's love.

To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (Jn. 1:12-13)

It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." 1 Cor. 1:30-31)

It is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good pleasure. (Phil.2:13)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. (Heb. 12:2)

Again, we do not come to faith out of a vacuum, nor is faith a decision we make. Faith is the natural response to the Holy Spirit's stimulating touch as He reveals to us God's love in the person and work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

It can be helpful here to liken faith to a reflex action. If we hit our elbow in the right place our arm moves. We do not decide to move our arm, it moves because it was created to respond to a stimulus in that way. Likewise, we have been created to respond to God's touches of love. The Holy Spirit, using such things as Word and Sacrament, touches us, revealing Himself in and with His love. If we do not resist, the natural response to such a stimulus, the response we were designed and created to make, is a response of faith.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (Rom. 1:16)

How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!..." Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Rom. 10:14-17)

When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not only as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (1 Thes. 2:13)

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Rom. 6:3,4)

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him." (Jn. 6:53-56)

The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this in remembrance of Me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

However, just as we can tighten our arm and resist making a response to a stimulating hit/touch, so also can we resist the work of the Holy Spirit, chief of which is the work of faith. We do not decide to believe, we simply have a God-stimulated response to God's proclaimed gospel; however, we can decide not to believe. We can decide to resist the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:31-32).

***We do not decide to believe, but we can decide not to believe.***

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Eph. 4:30)

Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. (1 Thes. 5:19,20)

Faith is not something we do or decide. We do not simply wake up one morning and of our own accord decide to believe. Rather the Holy Spirit, at every opportunity and with whatever means/tools are available to Him (the best of which are Word and Sacrament), strives to reveal to everyone God's love incarnate in the person and work of Jesus. As long as we do not resist, or as long as He can dissipate our resistance (thus allowing for our natural God-created response), we will by God's will, design, and grace come to faith, for:

God our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

Jesus in His love and through His suffering and death on the cross has freed us from the powers of sin, death, and the devil, and He has purchased a place in heaven for everyone. We are not saved because we choose to believe, rather, if anyone is to be eternally lost (and sadly, some will be), it is simply because by resisting the Holy Spirit's revelations of love, they have chosen in their unbelief, their distrust, to perpetuate their broken relationship with God. Robert Bertram, Paul Bretscher, Albert Huegli, O.P. Kretzmann, Edward Schroeder and John Strietelmeier, quoting and then commenting on C.F.W. Walther's ninth thesis concerning the proper distinction between law and gospel write:

*"The Word of God is not properly divided: 9) when the preacher appeals for faith as though a person could make himself believe or at least cooperate in coming to faith instead of preaching faith into a person's heart by proclaiming the promises of the Gospel."*

It is no comfort to the despairing sinner to be hounded by exhortations to "believe the Bible" or to "decide for Christ" when the whole hub of his problem is that he lacks the power either to believe or to accept.

The Gospel never commands; it only invites and promises. The power to accept its invitations and promises does not reside in the man who hears them, but in the Holy Spirit.

Evangelical preaching at its best directs men away from concentration on their faith to concentration on the sure promises of God spoken to them in Baptism and in the Gospel of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

And in commenting on Walther's twenty-fourth thesis, they write:

*"The Word of God is not properly divided: 20) when the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost is described in a manner as if it could not be forgiven because it is so great a sin."*

What makes this kind of sin unpardonable? Walther is empathetic: it is not because of the magnitude of the sin. As the Apostle Paul says, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The reason why this sin is unpardonable lies elsewhere. The Holy Ghost works faith in men's hearts. Those who reject the Holy Ghost are rejecting the only means by which they can be brought to faith. In this way the sin against

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<sup>13</sup> Bertram, Bretscher, Huegli, Kretzmann, Schroeder, Strietelmeier, "C. F. W. Walther On Law and Gospel," The Cresset, May, 1987, p. 11

the Holy Ghost cannot be forgiven. Whoever commits it is condemned not so much on account of the sin involved but on the account of unbelief...

It is the joy of the Gospel that there is no sin too great to be forgiven, so long as the sinner does not stubbornly thrust away the welcome of the Spirit. When he does that he has no means by which he can receive the blessing of the Lord.<sup>14</sup>

### **A PRESENT AS WELL AS A FUTURE REALITY**

The love of God is a present as well as a future reality. We do not have to wait until the “parousia,” when Jesus comes again, to experience life with God.

I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; He has crossed over from death to life. (Jn. 5:24)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live I live in the body, by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for us. (Gal. 2:20)

The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is within you. (Lk. 17:21)

We are free now and already have new life in Christ. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he (she) is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17)

### **WORD AND SACRAMENT** **MEANS OF GRACE: COMMUNICATING LOVE, YIELDING NEW LIFE**

Paul writes:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Rom. 10:14-17)

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 15

God communicates His love to us through the Word. Based on John. 1:1,14, first and foremost, this Word is the person of Jesus, the Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God .... The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word/the person of Jesus is communicated to us in the written Word of the Scriptures and through a physically tangible Word in the Sacrament of Baptism and in the

***Word and Sacrament are means of grace. They are not grace in and of themselves. Grace is Jesus' death on the cross.***

Sacrament of the Altar. In his Small Catechism Luther writes:

It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water, and our faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the water. For without the Word of God the water is merely water and not Baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

And

The eating and drinking do not in themselves produce them, but the words “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins.”

These words, when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament, and he who believes these words has what they say and declare: the forgiveness of sins.<sup>16</sup>

God uses the Scriptures and the sacraments to communicate the Word (the person and work of Jesus the Christ) to us that they might birth or awaken in us a response of faith. We are saved neither by the Scriptures, nor by the sacraments, nor even by faith. We are saved solely by grace, namely, by Jesus' death and resurrection. We are saved by grace—objective justification. However, it is through faith in God's grace, birthed by the Holy Spirit's communication through Word and Sacrament, we personally come to experience and enjoy for

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<sup>15</sup> Tappert, p. 445.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 352.

ourselves the grace of God—subjective justification (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Jn. 2:2). In order for faith to be birthed in us grace first must be communicated to us. The Holy Spirit’s chief and clearest tools of communication (means of grace) are the Holy Scriptures and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

In baptism God communicates His love in a very specific and tangible way. By the means of baptism God officially and publicly declares us to be a part of His family. At our baptism, God in His unfathomable love makes the same statement to and about us that He made to and about Jesus at His baptism – “This is My beloved child in whom I am well pleased” (Mk 1:11).

God does not love us or love us more because we are baptized, but in baptism we know and experience God’s love in a rich and full way. In human terms we are moved from being God’s foster children to being His adopted children.

A foster parent can be just as loving as an adoptive or as a biological parent. What matters is not the nature of the relationship, but the character of the parent. In God we have the perfect parent. As the perfect parent God is equally committed to His foster children (all non-baptized) as He is to His adoptive children (all baptized), and as He is to His biological child (Jesus). In fact, He is so committed to His foster and adopted children He sent His biological child, Jesus, to die in their/our place. God’s love and commitment do not change because we are baptized, however, our experience of His love does.

***In our baptisms God publicly declares us to be His beloved children in whom He is well pleased! It is like a signing of formal adoption papers.***

Baptism is like God signing formal adoption papers through which He commits Himself publicly and eternally to be our loving parent. We are not saved by baptism; we are saved by grace; by what Jesus did for us in His death and resurrection. However, we can and do come to

know and experience our salvation in and through our baptism (Eph 2:8). Baptism is therefore a “means of grace” as it is a means God uses to communicate and guarantee His love and commitment to us.

Just as a foster child, or an adoptive child, or a biological child can run away from home and miss the experience of a parents’ love, so can we, even though baptized, run away from God, and miss the full experience of His love. However, as we have been adopted through baptism, God seeks to assure us that, if we should ever run away, we always have a home to which we can return.

Baptism is more than mere adoption, however. In this communication of love, we recognize ourselves as being reborn. We now have different parentage and a different nature living in us. Our new parentage and nature is now of God. In baptism God tells us that which is

***In baptism we are a new creation, created in Christ with Jesus living His life in us that He might also live His life through us.***

of Adam, our old nature, is dead and buried (Rom. 6:3-4); and that He even now is resurrecting in us a new nature, His nature, as Jesus through the Spirit now lives within us. Consider the following verses, one from each of the six chapters in Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians. Each of these passages identifies us as being new creations in and through Christ:

God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. (Gal. 1:15,16)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life that I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal. 3:27)

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now. (Gal. 4:19)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22,23).<sup>17</sup>

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. (Gal. 6:14,15)

The truth of the above passages in regard to our being a new creation, a Christ-creation, being created in and through Christ are echoed by Luther when he writes:

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. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. 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; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his.<sup>18</sup>

If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all mine is his.<sup>19</sup>

This communication of love awakens us to and empowers us for new life as His new creations "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17)

Luther teaches us to remember our baptisms daily. He encourages us to remember that through our baptisms we have become so united with Jesus that His death is our death and that His resurrection is our

resurrection. Although our baptism is a one-time event (Ephesians 4:5), the effects of our

***Remember your baptism daily. You are a new creation today—this very moment.***

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<sup>17</sup> The fruit of the Spirit in this passage is singular. There is only one fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit works in us the person and personality of Jesus the Christ. As we are identified with and have Jesus we have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control because Jesus is all these things in us (Gal. 1:15-16; Gal. 2:20; Gal. 3:27; Gal. 4:19, Gal. 5:22-23; Gal. 6:14-15).

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

baptism (death and resurrection) are not a one-time event, they are on-going. Death and resurrection are our constant experience. Through our union with Jesus, which we know and appreciate through baptism, in each new moment of life we experience and enjoy death and resurrection. In each new moment of life, we are a new creation in resurrection power, and with the resurrection power of Christ at our disposal.

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life .... For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin . . . . The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives He live to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus .... Offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. (Rom. 6:3-13)

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Cor. 4:10-11)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

In Him, you were also circumcised, in a putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Col. 2:11-12)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by as own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires .... For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and

blind, and as forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. (2 Pe. 1:3,4,8, 9)

***To see ourselves primarily as sinners is to find our identity in Adam. To see ourselves primarily as saints is to find our identity in Jesus.***

There is a very exciting truth here that I believe often gets overlooked or minimized in our thinking. In the church we talk about how we are simultaneously “saint and sinner,” and it is true we are. The question is: “Which is our primary identity?” Are we primarily “saint” or are we primarily “sinner”?

When I was teaching at Concordia University Chicago, I remember one day visiting in my office with a pastor friend and one of our DCE interns. During our visit, my pastor friend mentioned that

something I had asked him in his office a couple of months earlier had been disturbing him in a good way. The question I had asked was “Do you see yourself primarily as a saint or as a sinner?” My friend shared this question had been haunting him ever since and that after our conversation in his office he had asked a number of his pastor friends the same question. He shared that each and every one of them stated that they saw themselves primarily as sinners.

I find this sad. To see ourselves primarily as sinners is to find our primary identity in Adam. To see ourselves primarily as saints is to find our primary identity in Jesus. While we indeed are both saint and sinner, if we see ourselves primarily as sinners, when tempted we will tend to give into it and sin for that is what sinners do. Sinners sin. I am a sinner so when tempted I sin. However, if we see ourselves primarily as saints, as new creations in Christ Jesus in whom Jesus dwells in resurrection power, then when tempted, we will be much less likely to give into it because that is not who we are. Growing up you probably heard from your parents phrases like “In this family we do....” or, “In this family we don’t do....” Likewise in Christ and in

His family there are things we do and just don't do. "That's not who I am." or "It's something I do."

It is true that we are sinners. Paul in Philippians 3:12-14 talks about how he hasn't arrived but is pressing on toward the goal. In 1 Timothy 1:15 he calls himself "chief of sinners" and in Romans 7:15-25 he graphically describes the struggle that wars within him.

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

***Jesus doesn't want us to try to live our lives "for" Him. He knows we can't. Rather He wants to live HIS life "through" us.***

In this Roman's passage note the number of first-person pronouns Paul uses. In eleven verses Paul refers to himself in the first person thirty-nine times. No wonder he was experiencing problems. "For what 'I' do is not the good 'I' want to do; no, the evil 'I' do not want to do—this 'I' keep on doing." Paul's problem is that he is trying to live his life for Jesus, rather than let Jesus live His life through Paul. At the height of his agony, Paul asks, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" and then the light suddenly goes on in his head—"Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" And in Romans 8:1-4 he continues the thought.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free

from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Jesus wants us to fix our eyes upon Him (Heb. 12:2) and to find our identity in Him (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 4:11-12; 2 Cor. 5:17). To the extent we identify with Adam we have no power. To the extent that we identify with Jesus, we have the resurrection power of Jesus at our disposal.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3:20-21)

To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Col. 1:29)

While we still experience temptation we now are free from an enslavement to the powers and appetites that once ruled us (Jn. 16:33; 1 Cor. 10:13). In our newfound freedom, we are not only free from, but we are also free for . . . . In Christ we are free for others. In Christ we are freed and empowered to love.

You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." . . . The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal. 5:13,14,22-25)

The Sacrament of the Altar, like Baptism, is a communication of God's love. "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor. 11:26) In the Sacrament of the Altar Jesus presents us with His body and His blood.

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Cor. 11:24,25)

Here, like in the water of baptism, we have physical evidence and a guarantee: In the Lord's Supper, in a way our finite minds cannot fully comprehend, we have present in, with, under, and through the bread and the wine Jesus' body which was actually broken for us and His blood which was actually shed for us. Since Jesus did not die for nothing we can know through this evidence that our sins are forgiven. "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (Gal. 2:21) And in as much as Jesus did not stay dead, we can know that His life in resurrection power even now dwells within us: "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me." (Jn. 6:55-57)

**For Reflection:**

1. What is your understanding of "civil righteousness"? ...of "spiritual righteousness"?
2. Give some examples of an "obedience that comes from faith" (Rom. 1:5) as opposed to an obedience that does not come from faith.
3. Do you agree that Adam and Eve's original sin was distrust. (p. 18) Do you agree? Explain.
4. Do you agree that the sin of people today is also one of distrust. (p. 19) Explain.
5. According to the author, how does a person come to faith? Do you agree? Explain.
6. What is the author's understanding of "righteousness" and how one becomes righteous?
7. What do you believe to be "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 12:31)? Explain.
8. Critique the author's likening of faith to a reflex action. (p. 33)
9. Critique the author's understanding of baptism. (p. 38-41).
10. How do you understand what the author says about seeing ourselves primarily as saints with our identity in Christ, rather than primarily as sinners with our identity in Adam? (p. 42-44) Do you agree? Explain.
11. React to and discuss the Scripture passages the author uses to support his position. Which passage did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
12. React to and discuss the quotes from Luther and other theologians that the author uses to support his position. Which quote did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
13. What, if anything in the chapter do you most appreciate and are ready to embrace? With what, if anything, do you most disagree or would like further clarification or discussion?

**Reflections and Learnings**  
**Complete as Appropriate**

Something that excites me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something that challenges me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something I would question \_\_\_\_\_

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I most want to remember \_\_\_\_\_

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A difference this will make in my life \_\_\_\_\_

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### 3. HUMANITY'S LOVE FOR GOD

#### *So Beautiful*

*It is all so beautiful,  
I love You, Jesus,  
I've been so stupid,  
I've neglected You, us,  
but You stayed near – helping, comforting, giving.*

*In my neglect there was loneliness, emptiness,  
the thought chills me,  
But You were also there, softly calling my name,  
as I now turn back to You I see Your arms wide open,  
and I realize that is the way they always are –  
welcoming me,  
wanting to hold me.  
Yes, I've been stupid.*

*You have forced me to face my weaknesses, my neglect,  
and 'though sorry, I cannot help but feel joy.  
Joy because You understand,  
You accept me and You love me in spite of myself.*

*Lord, I'm sorry for my past,  
but my past is just that – past.  
Life is now and future,  
and in You life can be and is actualized, realized in its fullest potential.*

*It is all so beautiful,  
I love You, dear Jesus,  
Thank You! Thank You!*

Bill Cullen  
February, 1979

#### **WHY HUMANITY LOVES GOD**

“We love because God first loved us.” (1 Jn. 4:19) Whereas God’s love is an “in spite of” love, our love is a “because” love. St. Augustine in a sermon on love has written, “Since the Holy Spirit is one with God, we cannot love God unless through the Holy Spirit: let us therefore love God from God.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Quincy Howe, Jr., trans. & ed., *Selected Sermons of St. Augustine*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1966, p. 4.

Donald Ziemke writing on Luther states, “The love that unites man to God, directly or indirectly through love for their neighbor, is not man’s love – for, as Luther said, that would be the righteousness of works – but God’s love, i.e. the Holy Spirit.”<sup>21</sup> It is in the fact that God is love and that He “poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5) that we can love.

Augustine writes:

There is no man who does not love. It need only be asked what he loves. We are not urged to forebear from loving, but only that we choose with care that which we do love. But what are we to choose, unless we are first chosen? What are we to love, unless we are first loved?<sup>22</sup>

Again, Augustine writes:

Thus we have loved. And how has this been given to us? “It is because he has first loved us.” Ask why man loves God and you will find no answer but that God loved man first. He whom we love gave Himself and thus gave us cause to love in return. Learn from the Apostle Paul what cause He gave us that we should love. “The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts” (Rom. 5:5). And where does this love come from? From us perhaps? Not at all. “It comes by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (ibid.)”<sup>23</sup>

### **HOW HUMANITY CAN LOVE GOD**

God has loved us and in realizing His love we, in turn, respond with love. What God offers us is nothing less than Himself, but it is only through faith in His love that we receive Him. “God sets himself apart for you that you may find joy in Him .... Detach your heart from love of creation that you may cleave to the Creator and that you may say the words of the Psalm: ‘but

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<sup>21</sup> Donald C. Ziemke, *Love for the Neighbor in Luther’s Theology*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Howe, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 8

it is good for me to adhere to my God.”<sup>24</sup> Cleaving to something other than God, other than the true Ultimate, is an idolatrous love which can only leave us unsatisfied.

Augustine points out that when our hearts are focused on ourselves and subject to ourselves we are “dragged through foolhardiness and through loves both wanton and ruinous.”<sup>25</sup> Self-love or pride is the root of all sin as it turns us away from our God. As St. Paul says, it is through Him alone that we have our being – “For in him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)

Remember that the sin of Adam and Eve, that which broke their relationship with God, was a focusing upon and a placing of their trust in themselves rather than in God. Therefore, in a very real sense, “self” has to die in order that Jesus might live. The self we are by the nature of our physical birth, that which is of Adam, must die day after day, moment after moment, in order that Jesus might be resurrected and born anew in us each day, yes, even in each new moment.

I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. (1 Cor. 15:31)

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Cor. 4:10-11)

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin . . . . Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him . . . . The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 6:6-11)

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17)

***It's a New Day***

*The thought just struck me,  
it's a new day, Lord.  
A new day to live,  
to experience,  
in my new life.*

*As I think about it, I am getting excited,  
yesterday is gone,  
and with it all I was is past.  
Today, I have new life,  
with new potential.*

*Once again, born to another day,  
a new day –  
fresh,  
different,  
alive,  
holding so very much.*

*Reborn to experience new life,  
reborn, born again, in Christ, in You;  
which continually puts to death all I was,  
but awakens – bringing into focus and experience all that is new and  
now real.*

*Dead is the person of yesterday,  
last week,  
last year,  
alive is the person of today,  
now;  
becoming the person of tomorrow.*

*It's a new day, Lord!*

Bill Cullen, April, 1983

Jesus' death and resurrection are objective facts God communicates to us through His Word and through the Sacraments, awaking or birthing within us faith. As we through faith receive or acknowledge these facts, the facts become our personal experience. As we see

ourselves united with Christ in His death, we experience the old nature born of Adam (our old “self”) dying within us, and a new nature, the person and nature of Christ, being resurrected or birthed within us. As Christians, we strive not for high “self-esteem” since self, that which is born of Adam, must die. As Christians we seek only high “Christ-esteem” which we have as a gift of grace, which we experience through faith as Christ is born and formed in us (Gal. 4:19).<sup>26</sup>

Concerning our human pride, Luther wrote: “Against this secret villain we must pray God daily to suppress our self-esteem.”<sup>27</sup> And in regard to our two natures he wrote: “There is a double life: my own which is natural or animate; and an alien life, that of Christ in me. So far as my animate life is concerned, I am dead and am now living an alien life.”<sup>28</sup> In this same vein Jesus reminds us “... apart from me you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5) It is only in, through, and by Christ that we are in relationship with God, and it is only in and out of our relationship with God that we can do anything truly good or God-pleasing.

Here the concept of love gets a little sticky. *Agape* love is in giving as Christ has given and continues to give both to us and through us to others – unconditionally and freely. *Agape* love is a closing of our eyes to our wants

***I must confess I struggle here. I am always asking myself, "Are my expressions of love means to gratify myself and my ego or are they truly and simply a response to the needs of those about me?"***

and seeing only the wants or needs of the beloved and finding our joy in fulfilling these wants or needs. Yet, the joy is a by-product and not a motivation. If it is still a motivation, then our love is still really focused in and on ourselves. Having felt God’s love, we strive for obedience and perfection not because of what God will do for us in return, but because of what He has

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<sup>26</sup> Don Matzat, *Christ Esteem*, Harvest House, Eugene, 1990.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, Philadelphia: Muhlenburg, 1962, pp. 188-189.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther, *1535 Commentary on Galatians*, p. 170.

done for us and seeks to do through us. Christianity is a “because...therefore” religion. “Because God has..., therefore we...” (1 Jn. 4:19).<sup>29</sup> Now we actually love Him, want to please Him, and are enabled/empowered by Him.

### **Love**

*Love, what is it?  
Love, where can I find it?*

*We look around the world and what do we see?  
We see war, strife, wanting, self-interests, prejudice, discrimination and much more.*

*Is there love, can there be love in such a world?*

*Some hold that love is sharing, that love is only given when it can be returned.  
But is this love, or is it an excuse for love?*

*Is it truly love when we look for a reward?  
Even if the only return we want is the love and friendship of another – is this truly love?  
Is love so selfish that it can only be given when it expects and seeks a returned love?*

*No, this must not be!*

*Love is God! God is love!*

*God’s love was true, is true!  
It was and is given to us not to benefit God,  
but solely to benefit us.*

*Jesus became a man and died not to benefit God,  
Jesus died not for Himself, but solely for us,  
solely to benefit us, to give us salvation.  
He did this because He loves us and is concerned for us.  
This is love, God is love!*

*Is this love I have?  
Do I love to give, or do I love to receive?  
Do I love only that I might receive love from others?*

*Lord, I don’t know. Help me, I am weak and selfish.  
Help me, Lord! Help me to love to give.  
Help me to give totally of myself.*

*Bill Cullen, June, 1970*

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<sup>29</sup> Dr. Harry Wendt talks of the “because...therefore” nature of the Christian’s relationship with God in his *Crossways* and *Divine Drama* study materials.

We love because he first loved us. (1 Jn. 4:19)

If you love me, you will obey what I command. (Jn. 14:15)

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 Jn. 5:3-5)

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. (2 Cor. 5:14)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Rom. 12:1)

We find joy in pleasing God and sorrow in displeasing Him. Even this, however, is not to

***Love is self-forgetfulness in other-thoughtfulness.***

be the motivation for our acts of love, because in love we are no longer concentrating on ourselves but on the beloved—God and others. We might say true *agape* love like true humility is self-forgetfulness in other-thoughtfulness. Don Ziemke writes:

He could hear God saying to him, "I see you sin, I do not condemn you, but you displease me," Wishing not to appear odious in the eyes of his Father, who is a lenient judge, he would be fearful, not of being condemned, punished, or tortured, but rather of impairing the joy of his Father and offending in the sight of His loving eyes. If he himself loves the Lord and knows that the Lord loves him, he will do nothing to displease Him who loves him.<sup>30</sup>

Jesus instructs us "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Mt. 22:37) Our lives are to reflect the glory of God in everything we do and say.

It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." (Mt. 4:10)

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<sup>30</sup> Donald C. Ziemke, *Love for the Neighbor in Luther's Theology*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 35.

Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Mt. 5:16)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10)

By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. (Jn. 15:8)

This complete focusing on God, leaves nothing in ourselves in which to take pleasure, and in reality there is nothing in ourselves in which we can find true pleasure for "in self" "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) However, as Christians, we are no longer "in self." We are now "in Christ." We become filled with His being, and to the extent that we are so filled we are filled with life itself.

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. (Jn. 1:4)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life." (Jn. 11:25)

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (Jn. 14:6)

We love not through our human will, resolve or effort. We can and do love only through our "self" death. It is only because of our position in Christ and His position in us that we are able to *agape* love. It is as we daily die to self through the on-going effect of our baptisms that Christ is daily resurrected in us, and that His love is poured out both in us and through us toward God and toward others.<sup>31</sup>

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom. 5:5)

Therefore, my dear friends . . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12-13)

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<sup>31</sup> I am not suggesting that non-Christians are incapable of loving. Non-Christians have experienced Christ's love regardless of whether or not they recognize it (Mt. 5:44-45). I am suggesting that it is in our experiences of love that we become free from self and are able to "die to self." It is in this selflessness, enabled by having been loved, that we are then free to love. The greater awareness we have of Christ's love for and in us, the greater our readiness to "die to self" and to live lives of love for others.

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor. 3:4-6)

***Christ-esteem  
vs.  
Self-esteem***

No one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:29-31)

When I have a hard time loving someone I like to ask myself three simple questions with obvious answers. First question: “Does Jesus love this person?” Obviously, Jesus loves the person. Second question: “Does Jesus live in me?” Yes, through His Spirit Jesus indwells me. Third question: “Does the Jesus in me love this person?” Well, yes, the JESUS in me loves the person. Okay, Bill, get out of the way and let JESUS do His thing.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:4-5)

### **LOVE IS A RESPONSE IN FREEDOM**

It is because of God’s love for us that we can and do love Him. Not only does His love give us salvation, but it also frees us from the obligation to and the consequences of the law. “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Gal. 5:21) We no longer walk, act, or live in fear of damnation. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (1 Jn. 4:18)

Eternal life is already ours. “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (Jn. 5:24) We know that although it displeases and hurts God when we falter and sin, the eternal consequences of such actions have already been settled by Jesus in His atoning sacrifice.

I write you this, my children, so that you will not sin; but if anyone does sin, we have Jesus Christ the righteous, who pleads for us with the Father. For Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven, and not our sins only, but also the sins of all people. (1 Jn. 2:1-2)

Through the Holy Spirit we are assured of this loving acceptance and forgiveness with an assurance that transcends all other perceived realities. The Holy Spirit, in a very real way our Sixth Sense,<sup>42</sup> births in us a living, dynamic faith that makes God the most concrete thing in our existence.<sup>43</sup>

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (Jn. 14:27)

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom. 5:5)

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. (Rom. 8:15-16)

God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may

***Just as we know physical reality through our physical senses, so we know spiritual reality through our spiritual sense. The Holy Spirit is like a Sixth Sense—God's guarantee of Himself and His truths.***

<sup>42</sup> I believe that the Holy Spirit in many ways operates like a “Sixth Sense.” Just as we know and experience physical reality through our five physical senses, so do we know and experience God as God through our Sixth Sense—the Holy Spirit. We know a table exists because we can see it, touch it, hear a noise if we pound upon it, smell it and if we should lick it, taste it. Likewise, we know spiritual reality and that God exists through the Holy Spirit, our Spirit-sense (1 Cor. 2:10-16; 1 Cor. 12:3).

<sup>43</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, Harper and Row, New York, 1958, p. 47.

understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:10-16)

It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Cor. 1:22)

We live by faith, not by sight. (2 Cor. 5:7)

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:7)

In this assurance of God's love, we are free to love, both because we are free from self-concern and because we no longer have any outstanding debt or obligation before us.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. (Mt. 6:25-32)

I do not reject the grace of God. If a person is put right with God through the Law, it means that Christ died for nothing! (Gal. 2:21)

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal. 5:4-6)

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3-4)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by his wounds we are healed. (1 Pe. 2:24)

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Pe. 5:7)

Luther says:

. . . a Christian has all that he needs in faith and needs no works to justify him; and if he has no need of works, he has no need of the law, surely he is free from the law .... This is that Christian liberty, our faith, which does not induce us to live in idleness or wickedness but makes the law and works unnecessary for any man's righteousness and salvation.<sup>44</sup>

**Love  
automatically  
fulfills  
the  
Law**

To the extent that we in faith live by and walk in the Spirit, the Law becomes unnecessary as God's will is done not out of Law, but through our Spirit-sense, out of love. A loving parent gives his or her four-year-old child a commandment not to play in the street. The parent gives this command because at four years of age the child does not have enough common sense to know better. This same parent probably would not give the same commandment to a twenty-year-old son or daughter because the parent would trust the twenty-year-old to have enough common sense to know better. In the Spirit we have something better than common sense. In the Spirit we have Spirit-sense. To the extent that we have and listen to our Spirit-sense we do not need an external law to direct us.

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel  
after that time," declares the LORD.

"I will put my law in their minds

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<sup>44</sup> Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 12.

and write it on their hearts.  
I will be their God,  
and they will be my people.  
<sup>34</sup> No longer will a man teach his neighbor,  
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,'  
because they will all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest,"  
declares the LORD. (Jer. 31:33-34)

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Mt. 22:40)

If you love me, you will obey what I command. (Jn. 14:15)

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature .... If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal. 5:16,18,25)

Your life must be controlled by love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice which pleases God. (Eph. 5:2)

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 Jn. 5:3-5)

It is as God's active, sacrificial love is personally realized, and becomes ours in faith, that our love is born. Faith becomes active with a responsive love and moves us to adhere to the will of God. Luther says ". . . 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."<sup>45</sup>

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal. 5:6)

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

Luther recognized that there is a civil righteousness (a righteousness in the eyes of humanity) as well as a spiritual righteousness. He also recognized the danger of civil righteousness if it rejects the grace of God in a reliance on oneself and one's own self-righteousness. Such a reliance would require perfect obedience to the Law.

***True good works flow from faith in God's love, rather than from a need to perform for God.***

...there is the righteousness of works, or moral and civil righteousness; but he denies that Abraham is justified in God's sight by this, even if he is righteous in the sight of men because of it. With this righteousness, he has indeed something to boast about before men, but like the rest he falls short of the glory of God.<sup>46</sup>

I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:20)

Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. (Gal. 5:3,4)

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Rom. 10:1-4)

Works in and of themselves are good, but they become bad if people become reliant on them, if they pull people away from trusting in God's grace for "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11:6) This is why Paul writes: "Anything not based on faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23) Luther writes: "The works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the

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<sup>46</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's works*, Vol. 25, Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis, 1972.

work out of spontaneous love in obedience to God and considers nothing except the approval of God, whom he would most scrupulously obey in all things.”<sup>47</sup>

In John 15:9-11 Jesus says:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now abide in my love. If you obey my commands, you will abide in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and abide in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be made complete.

In a quick reading of this passage, it might appear as if it contradicts what we have been saying. To some it might initially appear that Jesus is saying “If you obey My commands, I will love you and if you disobey, you will lose My love.” However, a careful reading of the passage lends its support to our argument. Jesus definitively states, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.” Jesus loves us – period! In the passage Jesus states His love for us, and then He encourages us to abide in, that is, to live in—to experience and enjoy His love. Jesus loves us period, but it is as we abide in, live in, and walk in His love that we experience and enjoy it in the fullness and richness with which God intends for His love to be experienced.

***Disobedience does not change God's love for us, but it does affect the way we experience His love.***

Allow me to illustrate. A loving mother tells her little boy not to touch the hot stove. If the child obeys the mother, the child enjoys the fruit of the mother’s love and wisdom by not getting burned. If the child disobeys, the mother still loves the child and will even doctor his wounds and nurse him back to health. However, the child will have missed out on the wisdom of his mother’s love, and the joy that he would have known if he had obeyed. Likewise, Jesus continues to love us even in our disobedience. He forgives us and nurses us back to health.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

However, in disobedience we miss experiencing the full wisdom of Jesus' love and we miss the joy that obedience would have yielded.

Likewise in Philippians 2:12-13, Paul writes: “. . . work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” We note that Paul does not say “work *for* your salvation,” as if it was something to be earned. Rather he says “work out your salvation.” He assumes his readers have salvation and he instructs them/us to live out the salvation we have (by grace) in such a way that it finds tangible and daily expression in our lives, for this is indeed God's good purpose (and as a by-product will result in experiencing joy – Jn. 15:9-11).

Paul writes in Philippians 3:12-14,

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Luther, likewise, recognizes that the Christian does not yet live perfectly. Luther describes the Christian as being simultaneously saint and sinner.<sup>48</sup> He writes:

The works of a believer are like this. Through his faith he has been restored to Paradise and created anew, has no need of works that he may become or be righteous; but that he may not be idle and may provide for and keep His body, he must do such works freely to please God. Since, however, we are not wholly recreated and our faith and love are not yet perfect, these are to be increased, not by external works, however, but of themselves.<sup>49</sup>

Again, he writes:

The inner man, who by faith is created in the image of God, is both joyful and happy because of Christ in whom so many benefits are conferred

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<sup>48</sup> George Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, The American Press, New York, 1954, p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Luther, p. 23.

upon him; and therefore it is his one occupation to serve God joyfully and without thought of gain, in love that is not constrained.<sup>50</sup>

Although we are commanded to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39), the motive in love does not rise from fear of divine judgment. If it did, it would be an expression of self-love and simply civil righteousness. Again, John writes: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (1 Jn. 4:18) Our motive in love is a response of gratitude for and to divine grace.<sup>51</sup> “We love, because he first loved us.” (1 Jn. 4:19) Conformity to God’s will does not come in a suppression of our own will but in a transformation of our will through an intimate, *yada*, love/trust relationship with God.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom. 12:1-2)

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Christ with all saints, by His love, takes upon himself our form, fights with us against sin, death and all evil; this enkindles in us such love that we take His form, rely upon His righteousness, life and blessedness, and through the interchange of His blessings and our misfortunes are one loaf, one bread, one body, one drink, and have all things in common . . . . Again, through this same love, we are to be changed and to make the infirmities of all other Christians our own, take upon ourselves their form and their necessity and make theirs all the good that is within our power, that they may enjoy it . . . . In this way we are changed into one another and are

***“Christ alone  
is true  
sanctification”***

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Emory Stevens Bucke, ed, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Abingdon Press, New York, 1962, p. 173.

brought into fellowship with one another by love, without which there can be no change.<sup>52</sup>

James Gustafson writes:

The issue is much discussed in Luther's interpretation. Clearly for Luther, Christ alone is true sanctification; he alone can make men holy through the work of the Holy Spirit, with the Word and the sacraments as his means. Through faith alone, this sanctifying work has its effect. The Christian remains sinner and unbeliever, but his sin is forgiven; he is "graced." But through the Spirit we can grow in faith; sanctification is the "obliteration, washing away, and death" of our hearts. In faith, the Holy Spirit works through our person, in our acts of love. We are not only declared righteous, not only freed from the reckoning of our sins against us, but also we begin the new life, and we grow in the struggle against sin and the new man is daily brought to life by the presence of Christ and to act in love .... Overall, it is clear that the sanctifying power and presence of Christ and the Spirit is not without fruits of love in a new life.<sup>53</sup>

### **GOD'S CALL AND HUMANITY'S IMPERFECTION IN LOVE**

God calls us to have an *agape* love both for Himself and for all people. However, as we have previously mentioned, our love is essentially a "because" love – "We love because he first loved us." (1 Jn. 4:19) Our love is not as pure and noble as it ought to be. For the most part our love (or at least mine) is not a truly selfless love. When conditions change, all too frequently our love changes. Our love is not completely selfless because Satan keeps imprinting a scar of our "old self" upon our new nature (in effect we dig up and drag around a deceptive corpse).

Personally, I really want Jesus living in and through me. My problem or struggle is that "I" don't want to die to self in order for that to happen. "I" like a zombie<sup>54</sup> wants to live as well.

I am so awed and humbled by John the Baptist where he says of Jesus "He must increase and I

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<sup>52</sup> Ziemke, p. 47.

<sup>53</sup> James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life*, Harper and Row, New York, 1968, p. 65.

<sup>54</sup> "Zombie" is a relatively fitting descriptor of our "old Adam." The word translated as "baptized" in Romans 6:3 in the Greek text is *ebaptisthemen* which is the aorist form βαπτίζω transliteration: *baptizo*. In Greek there is the aorist past and the perfect past. In an aorist past the past action is completed and it has no impact upon the present. In a perfect past the past action carries over into the present and into the future. If the Romans 6 passage had used a present past verb, it would have meant that in baptism our old Adam would have died and would have

must decrease.” (Jn 3:30) Only to the extent that we die to self is Christ’s love able to live in and through us. We thank God “that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Phil. 1:6) as we remember that in and through our baptisms we daily die with Christ to self, and that daily, momentarily, we are a new creation, reborn in Christ (Rom. 6:3,4; 2 Cor. 4:10,11).

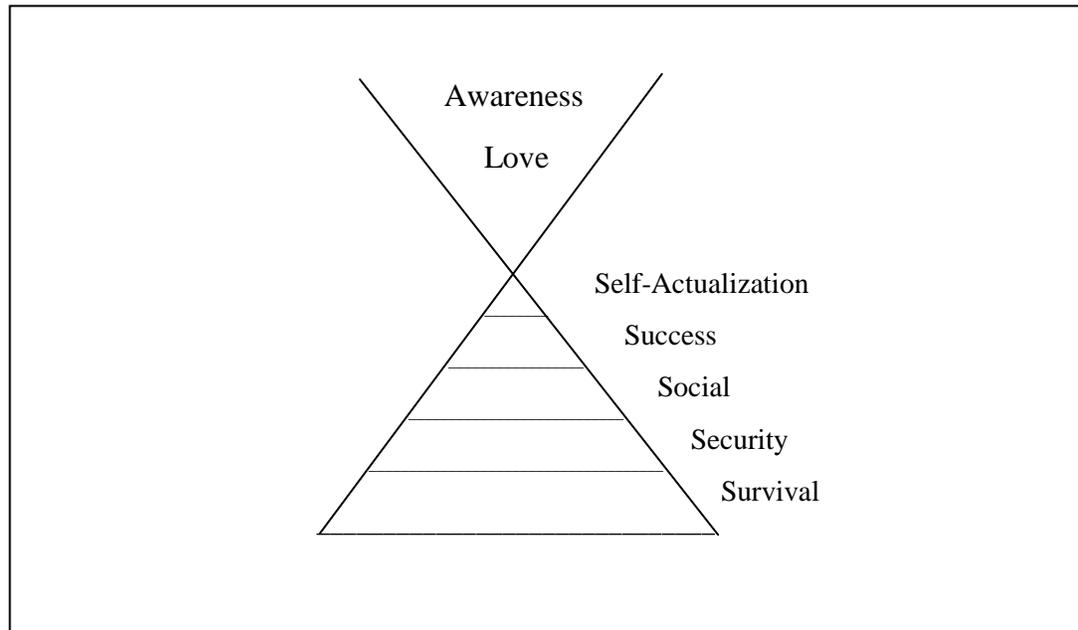
It is as we experience God’s love that our lives becomes transformed by His love. As we experience God’s love, and as we recognize God in our experiences of love (seeing Jesus as and for whom He is), we become less occupied with self. We no longer feel a need to protect our back because we know He has our back. We willingly die to self as we become more committed to Him and to others, and we become more committed as we increasingly come to know Him in a *yada* sense. “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” (1 Jn. 3:2)

Abraham Maslow, in his hierarchy of needs, believed people’s motivation and behavior stemmed from their most basic felt need. At the most basic level was survival. When a person is falling off a cliff, he or she is generally not concerned with anything other than surviving. When survival needs have been met, one can begin to focus on security needs (i.e., where our next meal is coming from). If both survival and security needs are met, we are free to address our social needs (i.e., relationships). When survival, security and social needs are met we can

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stayed dead and stayed buried (Rom 6:4). However, by using baptized in an aorist form, the “old Adam,” although we were/are united with Jesus in death through our baptisms (a completed past action), our “old Adam” resurfaces in the present, which I like to liken to a “zombie” (living dead) fashion. In zombie like fashion, it hangs around animated by Satan, and continues to cause all kinds of havoc. That is why in 1 Corinthians 15:31 Paul will state that he dies daily and Luther will state in his Small Catechism that in baptism to old self is daily drown and a new self is daily raised. Our baptism while being a one-time event (Eph 4:4), daily works in us death and resurrection where our “old Adam” daily dies and our “new Adam,” our new nature in Christ, is daily raised in newness of life (Rom. 6:4,11,13; 2 Cor. 5:17).

address our need for success and a sense of achievement. And when all of these needs are met we can pursue self-actualization or being all that we have been created to be. Maslow also believed that we move up and down the needs triangle on a regular basis. We don't fall off a cliff every day, but on the days we do, survival is our top, if not our only, priority.



At the point of his death, Maslow had begun to work on an inverted triangle in which he said that once people were self-actualized they would no longer be motivated by personal need but by the loving awareness of others and their needs. Maslow believed that a self-actualized person would be basically need-free and therefore free from a preoccupation with self. When a person is free from a preoccupation with self, that person is also free for others. Maslow felt that a self-actualized person's love for others would continue to grow in direct proportion to his or her awareness of the needs of those around himself or herself. I believe this perspective is reflective of Christian thought. God frees us from a preoccupation with ourselves as we increasingly come to believe and know that in Jesus God cares for us. He has our back.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your

heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Mt. 6:25-33)

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Mt. 11:28-30)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (Jn. 14:27)

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (Jn. 16:33)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose . . . . He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Rom. 8:28, 32)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6,7)

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:12,13)

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Pe. 5:7)

As we trust in His wisdom, care, and power for us and in us, we are free to care for others.

... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together

with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3 :17-21).

As we recognize the needs of others, we will find our love growing in response to those needs.

We love, because he first loved us. (1 Jn. 4:19)

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom. 5:5)

For Christ's love compels us. (2 Cor. 5:14)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal. 5:6)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. (1 Jn. 4:7-19)

***"Christ's  
love  
compels  
us"***

Unlike Maslow, however, as Christians we believe we are not self-actualized simply because we have all our other needs (survival, security, social and success) met. In fact, we are not self-actualized at all. We are Christ-actualized. God doesn't promise that we will never go hungry. He doesn't even promise that if we do His will, we will not be abused, or that we will never have to experience some kind of martyrdom (Jn. 16:33). What He does promise is that He will always be with us. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt. 28:20) He promises us that nothing can ever separate us from His love.

***We are "God-Actualized"***

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38,39)

He promises that He will work out everything for good: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." (Rom. 8:28) He promises that He will strengthen and empower us for whatever we face.

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13)

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Mt. 11:28-30)

He promises that we will be more than conquerors. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom. 8:37) He promises

that we will have a peace that surpasses understanding.<sup>55</sup>

***God never promised us problem-free lives, but He does promise to be with us in our problems.***

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<sup>55</sup> This "peace that surpasses understanding" is different than that which the world gives (Jn 14:27). The peace the world gives is a very conditional peace, being conditioned by such things as 1) having good health, 2) having money in the bank and a good job, 3) not being in a war, 4) having family and friends, the list goes on. The peace the Jesus give is a peace that comes in the midst of problems. It is a peace that comes from knowing and trusting that in life and death God is with us and we are in God's loving hands. The peace that Jesus give comes even when there is no earthly reason to be at peace. It transcends understanding.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (Jn. 14:27)

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:7)

And He promises us that even if we should lose our lives, we really have not lost anything; rather we gain as we are then able to enjoy a more intimate and fulfilling relationship with Him.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phil. 1:21)

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. (Mk. 8:35)

As I reflect on the depth of God's love and the shallowness of my own selfish love, I am both challenged and comforted by Jesus' conversation with Peter in John 21:15-17. It is here that Jesus asks Peter three times "Do you love me?" As we read the account in the Greek, Jesus first asks Peter "Do you '*agapao*' me?" to which Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, I '*phileo*' you?" Jesus says, "Feed my sheep." A second time Jesus asks Peter "Do you '*agapao*' me?" A second time Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, I '*phileo*' you." Jesus says, "Care for my lambs." Finally, Jesus asks "Do you '*phileo*' me?" Again, Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, I '*phileo* you'." And again, Jesus says, "Feed my sheep."

I find this challenging in that Jesus uses the word *agapao* twice, suggesting to me that He is calling us to a true and pure *agape* love. An *agape* love is a love that is beyond ourselves. It is a love that is born and can only be expressed in and through Him.

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3 :17-21)



**"Do  
you  
love  
me?"**

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13 )

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

Jesus' conversation with Peter is comforting because even though we are being called to *agape* love, Jesus in using the word *phileo* the third time, was sensitive to where Peter was and to where we are. In His use of the word *phileo* the third time, it seems to me Jesus is saying "I am calling you to *agape* love. I used that word twice. However, *phileo* is fine for now. It is a good place to begin." Jesus, although He is constantly calling us to more, He accepts us where we are.

Do everything in love. (1 Cor. 16:14)

Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. (1 Thes. 4:9,10)

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 Jn. 2:1,2)

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 Jn. 3:1,2)

Not only does He accept us where we are, He is also able to work through us even in and with our imperfect "self" love. Even though Peter each time responded with *phileo*, Jesus still said "Feed my sheep." Jesus was willing to entrust to Peter that which was and is most precious and important to Him. He was willing to entrust to Peter those for whom He died.

Jesus accepts each of us as we are and He is able to use each of us, however imperfect we are.

If we are available, He is able. We truly have a great, good, and gracious God!

One final thought as I conclude this chapter. We cannot *agape* love anyone unless we *agape* love everyone. *Agape* love is unconditional. As soon as you love one person and not another you have a reason (a condition) for loving the one and not the other. Jesus is the only true *agape* lover. Jesus does not ask us to live our lives *for* Him. Rather, He seeks to live HIS life *through* us.

### **Reflections:**

1. The author argues that we need daily die to self in order that Christ might live in and through us. What does this mean to you? What does/would such dying and living look like?
2. The author describes love as “self-forgetfulness in other thoughtfulness.” (p. 53) How would you describe love?
3. React to and discuss the author’s speaking of the Holy Spirit as a Sixth Sense. (p. 56, note footnote #42.)
4. The author states: “To the extent that we in faith live by the Spirit the Law becomes unnecessary....” (p. 58) Do you agree? Explain. What thoughts do you have about “Spirit-sense”?
5. How do you understand the author’s statement: “Disobedience does not change God’s love for us, but it does affect the way we experience His love”? (p. 61)
6. What are your thoughts about Maslow’s inverted triangle? (p. 65-66)
7. React to and discuss the Scripture passages the author uses to support his position. Which passage did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
8. React to and discuss the quotes from Luther and other theologians that the author uses to support his position. Which quote did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
9. What, if anything in the chapter did you most appreciate and are ready to embrace? With what, if anything, did you most disagree or would like further clarification or discussion?

**Reflections and Learnings**  
**Complete as Appropriate**

Something that excites me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something that challenges me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something I would question \_\_\_\_\_

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I most want to remember \_\_\_\_\_

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A difference this will make in my life \_\_\_\_\_

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#### 4. HUMANITY'S LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

##### *True Life*

*It is all so real,  
I know life now.  
Life is, because God is!*

*Yours is the way of love, my God,  
the depth of which I cannot understand.  
Unconditional, unlimited love which knows no boundaries,  
love which is constantly giving totally of itself to all.*

*In this world it is so hard to envision such love,  
yet, I know this love,  
I experience it in You.  
I want to love as You love,  
yet, I know that if someone was as undeserving of my love as I am undeserving of Your love,  
well...???*

*My lack of love is not really so obvious in big things,  
but in the little things where I prefer myself to another.  
Lord, forgive me!*

*Thank You, Jesus,  
thank You for Your love which You have again abundantly shown me today.  
In the wealth of Your love motivate me to love in truth;  
in Your love help me see others before myself and to see You before and in all.*

*In You I know life and love –  
as You live in me, now live through me  
that I now may in You give life, give love, give myself.*

Bill Cullen  
April, 1981

#### **WHY PEOPLE SHOULD LOVE THEIR NEIGHBOR**

Now we will consider the ethic of love as it applies to loving one another. Gustafson writes:

In faith man is open to the saving love of God, which flows through him to serve the neighbor in love. The Christian is not compelled to follow Christ or to obey his teachings as a new form of extraneous law imposed upon him; he can go beyond doing freely what the law requires in personal relations to genuinely new and healing acts of love. "Faith active in love" is the theme of Luther's ethics of Christians (though there are also ethics of law which the Christian, like all men, has to uphold).<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life*, Harper and Row, New York, 1968, p. 119.

Christ's act of love in His suffering and death has freed us from the Law, imputing to us God's own righteousness, uniting us once again with the Creator. In this freedom we have been transformed (Rom. 12:2) and His love becomes a compelling force within us (2 Cor. 5:14). God's love has so engulfed us that we respond to Him with a "because" love. This "because" love is meant to manifest itself (however imperfectly) as an "in spite of" love in our relationships with one another. Jesus says, "A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then all will know you are my disciples" (Jn. 13:34,35). In 1 John 3:16-18 John writes:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

**"Love one another as I have loved you...."**

### **THE NATURE AND RESULT OF THIS LOVE**

This giving of our lives need not be in physically dying, although it is a dying to self, and for some it may mean physical death. For the majority of us it will be a dying to self-interest and a giving of ourselves into lives of service, offering ourselves as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1). It will be a focusing outside of ourselves and acting for others in the same way we would act for ourselves. Luther says:

A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. 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.<sup>57</sup>

In a very real sense Christian *agape*-love equals servanthood. Our most loving relationships tend also to be those relationships in which we experience the most servanthood.

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<sup>57</sup> Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 34.

I invite you to think about your most loving relationships. I suspect that these are also the relationships in which you most exercise servanthood. Love in action is servanthood. It is putting the interests and well-being of others before those of oneself. In Scripture we are challenged with such verses as:

Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mk. 10:43-45)

He said to them all: "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Lk. 9:23)

Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. (1 Cor. 10:23,24)

In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal. 5:6)

You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love. (Gal. 5:13 )

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others before you consider yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:3-8)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. If anyone has material possessions and sees another in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

In his *Lectures On Romans*, Luther gets very forceful about the looking beyond self to seeing only the neighbor and God. He writes:

The commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:19) or, as it is formulated in Lev. 19:18: "Love your friend as yourself" can be understood in a two-fold way.

First, one can take it to mean that both are commanded: We shall love our neighbor and ourselves as well. But another way to understand it is that it commands us to love only our neighbor and this according to the example of our love for ourselves. This is the better interpretation, for, because of the defect of his nature, man loves himself in everything, and he loves everything for his own sake, even when he loves his neighbor or his friend, for he seeks only his own therein.

This commandment, therefore, is very profound, and everyone must carefully examine and test himself by it. For by the phrase "as yourself" every kind of stimulated love is ruled out. Hence, he that loves his neighbor on account of his

money		powerless	
honor	and would not love	lowly	would obviously have
learning	him if he were	ignorant	a hypocritical love for
favor		hateful	him.
power		dependent	
comfort		uncouth	

For, having his own advantage in mind, he does not love him as he is but he loves what he has and owns, and therefore he does not love him "as himself" for he loves himself even if he is poor, dull and a complete nonentity .

. . . it causes man to deny himself and to affirm his neighbor, to put on affection for others and to put off affection for himself, to place himself in the position of his neighbor and then to judge what he would want him to do to himself and what he himself and others could do to him.<sup>58</sup>

**"Love causes man to deny himself and to affirm his neighbor"**

In the above quote Luther refutes the idea of Augustine that we are to allow some justification for a proper regard of self. He holds that our love for our neighbor should search out our selfishness, and, as Kierkegaard felt, that a love outside ourselves, a love for God and a love for our neighbor, would lead us to hate ourselves.<sup>59</sup> This hatred of self is not hatred of our existence, but a hatred of a self which is independent of others and independent of God. Our lives have meaning only in the context of God's creative and redemptive purposes, namely, within the context of love/trust relationships. We so hate our self-identity that we die to self. In

<sup>58</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther: Lecture On Romans*, trans. and ed. by William Pauck, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1961, p. 366, 367.

<sup>59</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *The Last Years Journals 1853-55*, trans. and ed. by Ronald Gregor Smith, The Fontana Library, Love and Brydone, London, 1965, p. 150, 151, 186, 187.

so doing, God gives us a Christ-identity which expresses itself in loving servanthood and which results in relationships, making God's joy, the beloved's joy, and our joy complete.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (Jn. 15:9-13)

In loving God and others, we realize our faults and our lack of complete love. We are beings at war with ourselves. The old nature of the flesh, that which is of Adam, rejoices in a focusing on ourselves, but our nature of the Spirit is sickened by it. As Christians grow in the Spirit (dying to self), they will become more and more dissatisfied and repulsed by their old nature of the flesh. Their old nature will cause them sorrow, yet Christians will at the same time find a growing peace and joy in their lives through the Spirit. Christians will always be in paradox in this world. Life will be full of tension, but we will also know the love of Christ.

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Rom. 8:6-13)

*"true love  
of  
yourself is  
hatred of  
yourself"*

Luther continues with the idea of love and hatred of oneself when he writes:

But true love of yourself is hatred of yourself. As our Lord says: "He that loves his soul shall lose it, and He that hates his soul shall find it." (John 12:25; Matt. 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24). And the apostle says in

Phil. 2:4: "Each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's" and in 1 Cor. 13:5: "Love does not seek its own."

... Consequently, you do evil if you love yourself, you will be free from this evil only if you love your neighbor in the same way in which you love yourself, i.e. if you cease to love yourself. If you do this, also the law will cease, for then it will no longer be necessary for you to love your neighbor as yourself, inasmuch as you no longer love yourself. Nor will it be necessary for you to love yourself as the neighbor, inasmuch as by loving your neighbor you clearly love yourself most truly and all others in turn love you.<sup>60</sup>

Here again, things get sticky because we cannot be motivated by our own interest in our love for our neighbor. We cannot love our neighbor in order that we might love ourselves properly. If that is our motivation, then our love of our neighbor is not truly loving him or her. It is really a selfish love. Loving our neighbor correctly needs to be a Spirit-led love through which we disregard or die to ourselves. In an earlier draft of this manuscript, I had written that "Loving our neighbor correctly needs to be a *spontaneous* love...." Upon further reflection I realized that was wrong. It may be a spontaneous love, but frequently it will not be. *Agape* love, as mentioned earlier, is an "in spite of love." It is not based in feelings as much as it is based in an act of the will. *Agape* love persists even when one does not like or feel lovingly for another. In *agape* love one can and frequently needs to intentionally choose to act in the best interests of the beloved as an act of commitment aside from feelings.

A number of years ago I was asked by a former member of a congregation I had served as a Director of Christian Education to give the message at her wedding. This I was happy to do. The following was part of the message.

People are going to share with you a lot of sweet sentiments today and that is nice. People will say things like: "May you always be as happy as you are today" or "May each day of your life together get better and better." These are nice sentiments, but they are not reality. Prayerfully,

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<sup>60</sup> Luther, *Luther: Lecture On Romans*, p. 406-408.

you will have many days like today, days where love comes easily and naturally – times when you feel love. It is easy to love in these good times. But the depth of your love will be demonstrated and seen in the not so good times, in the bad times. The depth of your love will be seen in your commitment to each other.

Stephanie and Lee, today you are feeling love and enjoying the ecstasy of love and that is great. Enjoy it as you enjoy each other, but know that today you are not experiencing the depth of each other's love. Stephanie you will experience the true depth of Lee's love when you are at your worst and Lee you will experience the true depth of Stephanie's love when you are at your worst. Stephanie, there are going to be days when you are going wake up next to Lee, take a look at him and think to yourself "Oh my God, what am I doing here?" And Lee the same will be true for you. The answer will be because of the love you have for each other – it is a love based not in feelings, but a love that is based in the commitment you have made to each other.

St. Paul writes:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others before you consider yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:3-8)

The proper love of self is a by-product of a proper love for God and for our neighbor.

Luther writes:

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. Accordingly 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). 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 which to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong member may serve the weaker, and we may be sons of God, each caring for and working for the other, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is truly active in 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.<sup>61</sup>

### **HOW PEOPLE CAN LOVE THEIR NEIGHBORS**

Luther felt self-love rules in natural man, and it contradicts the self-giving love which God has given to all people in Christ. He sets this “*agape*” of God sharply against all human loves and distinguishes between *agape* and civil righteousness saying:

For none loves righteousness save this one, Christ, all others either love money, or comfort or honor, or else despising these things, they seek glory, or if they are the best of people they love themselves more than righteousness. ...thus while love of self remains, a man cannot love righteousness or do its work, though he may pretend to do so, and the consequence is that the so-called virtues of the philosophers, and indeed of all men, whether the lawyers or the theologians, may appear to be virtues, but are really only vices.<sup>62</sup>

It is only by the grace of God bestowed upon us in Christ that we are able to truly love and that we are able to bear fruit.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (Jn. 15:1-8)

***If we  
abide in  
Him and  
He in us  
we will  
bear much  
fruit.***

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in

<sup>61</sup> Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 28.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel Day Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, Harper and Row, New York, 1968, p. 78.

love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3:16-20)

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:4-6)

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12-13)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2)

It is by grace alone, and by faith alone that the love of God can be known, responded to, and expressed in love for the neighbor. Nothing in human effort or will, nothing in our human loves, distorted as they are by sin, can be relied upon as indications of the love of God.<sup>63</sup>

***The true fruit of the Spirit is Jesus in us Who manifests Himself in love, joy, peace, etc. as Jesus knows no other way to act.***

Gustafson indicates that for Luther, grace gives us a whole new disposition. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22,23) This disposition is the disposition of Christ. It gives us His intentions and motivates us to do the good. Gustafson writes, “it brings his life under a new law of love; it gives him a new consciousness by exerting impulses and influences on him; it directs him toward his proper eternal end.”<sup>64</sup>

Daniel Williams writes:

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>64</sup> Gustafson, p. 113.

Luther gives the central theme. Through the Word of God Incarnate in Jesus Christ, as that word is preached and heard, and with the clarifying and renewing power of the Holy Spirit at work in man, the believer begins to live by the promises of God. He is released from condemnation. The new life consist in becoming conformed to the image of Christ and joined in spirit with him. Love becomes effective through the personal relationship which God creates between the believer and Christ, and the believer's side of this relationship is faith which is casting his trust completely on the grace of God.<sup>65</sup>

Faith, although identified by Williams as coming from the believer's side of the relationship, must not be understood simply as a human work or the best of all good works. Faith comes at God's initiative. It is a response to God. As we have already said in chapter 2 faith is like a reflex action. We have been created by God to respond to the Holy Spirit's touch in Word and Sacrament. If we do not resist the Holy Spirit's touch and simply allow the Holy Spirit to do His thing, He will generate faith within us. Resisting the Holy Spirit's work of faith is the only sin that is not forgiven and the only sin for which anyone will be eternally condemned.

And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Mt. 12:31,32)

Furthermore, it is not forgiven, not because it cannot be forgiven, rather it is not forgiven because when we resist the Holy Spirit we remain in unbelief thus rejecting the forgiveness and gifts God freely offers. In unbelief we choose to place ourselves outside of God's grace.

Again, quoting Bertram, Bretscher, Huegli, Kretzmann, Schroeder, and Strietelmeier, quoting and then commenting on C. F. W. Walther's twentieth theses on Law and Gospel write:.

*The Word of God is not properly divided: 20) when the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost is described in a manner as if it could not be forgiven because it is so great a sin.*

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<sup>65</sup> Williams, p. 80.

. . . What makes this kind of sin unpardonable? Walther is emphatic: it is not because of the magnitude of the sin. As the Apostle Paul says, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The reason why this sin is unpardonable lies elsewhere. The Holy Ghost works faith in men's hearts. Those who reject the Holy Ghost are rejecting the only means by which they are brought to faith. In this way the sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be forgiven. Whoever commits it is condemned not so much on account of the sin involved but on account of unbelief.<sup>66</sup>

Through faith the Holy spirit works new life in us. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). This new life is the very life of Christ Jesus in us.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:3-11)

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (2 Cor. 4:10,11)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal. 3:27)

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<sup>66</sup> Bertram, Bretscher, Huegli, Kretzmann, Schroeder, Strietelmeier, "C. F. W. Walther On Law and Gospel," The Cresset, May, 1987, p. 17

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you (Gal. 4:19)

God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:27)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Pe. 1:3,4)

Christ lives in us seeking also to live through us for others. His life in us manifests itself as a life of love for our neighbor.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (Jn. 15:1-8)

It is through love for our neighbor that we can best demonstrate our love for God.

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Mt. 25:31-40)

***Love is a force. It is dynamic.***

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 Jn. 4:20,21)

Behold from faith thus flows forth love and joy in the Lord, and from a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one's neighbor and takes no amount of gratitude or ingratitude, or praise or blame or loss ....

Therefore if we recognize the great and precious things which are given us, as Paul says (Romans 5:5) 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.<sup>67</sup>

Love is a force. It is dynamic. It is compelling, first filling us and then leaving us no choice but to act on behalf of the beloved. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul writes "The love of Christ compels us." The compelling "love of Christ" can be understood in two ways. First it can be understood as Christ's love for us. Christ's love for us so fills us and enriches us that it transforms us into lovers as He Himself loves.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. (Rom. 12:1)

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (Jn. 13:35)

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God,

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<sup>67</sup> Williams, p. 81.

and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. (1 Jn. 4:7-17)

This compelling “love of Christ” is *agape* love, understood first as Christ for us, and then through us it is Christ’s love for others. Secondly, the compelling “love of Christ” can be understood as our love for Christ in response to His love for us.

We love because he first loved us. (1 Jn. 4:19)

If you love me, you will obey what I command. (Jn. 14:15)

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 Jn. 5 :3-5)

God loves us in spite of ourselves and because of His “in spite of” love both for us and in us, we can now have an “in spite of” (*agape*) love for all others. Which in reality is His love in and through us (Jn. 15:5).

Behold, therefore, how freely all things are unto us by faith! And yet all things are subservient with us because of love, so that there is at the same time the servitude of liberty and the liberty of servitude for we owe no one anything but to love one another .... The “*ingressus*” into Christ is faith which brings us into the riches of the righteousness of God by which righteousness we now satisfy God and are justified and righteous, wanting no work whatsoever to form a righteousness for ourselves. And the “*egressus*” is love which causes us, clothed with the righteousness of God, to lay ourselves out for the service and benefit of our neighbor and to the exercising of our own bodies in order to be enabled to supply the wants of another’s poverty, so that they, being drawn by us, may with us enter into Christ. For as Christ came out from God and drew us, seeking nothing of his own in all of his life but only ours, so, when we have entered in by faith, we ought to go in also to draw out and attract others seeking nothing else but that we may serve all and save many, together with ourselves.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Donald C. Ziemke, *Love for the Neighbor in Luther's Theology*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 59.

Jesus' life and death not only redeem us, His life and death also serve as an example to us. Jesus has shown us how we are to live in humble servitude.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (Jn. 12:13-17)

***Jesus—  
Savior,  
Indweller,  
Empowerer  
and  
Example***

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:3-8)

Jesus not only taught us the meaning of love with words, but His every action was an act of love. The Gospel writers are continually telling us how Jesus was moved by pity, by compassion, by love to heal and to care for the masses of people who sought Him out and who gave Him no rest.

Christ has now commissioned us to be in co-mission with Him and to serve as He did.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (Jn. 13:34,35)

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (Jn. 15:12,13)

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." (Lk. 9:23)

However, Jesus is far more than merely an example of love. It is through Jesus' indwelling presence through His Spirit that we are able to love. An example without empowerment leaves us overwhelmingly burdened. An example with empowerment (His living and indwelling presence) produces godly fruit (Jn. 15:5; Gal. 2:20; Gal. 5:22-23).

With His commissioning He also empowers us.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18,19)

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant. (2 Cor. 3:4,5)

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13)

In Matthew 11:28-30 we read, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

When we are yoked with Jesus the burden is easy and light, not because it is small. Quite the opposite, Jesus carries a big, big load. The burden is easy and light because as we are yoked with Jesus we find that it is Jesus who is really carrying the load. Jesus is a doer. To be yoked with Jesus means we must be doers too; that, or we will get dragged along. However, as we are yoked with Jesus, we discover that the yoke has distributed the weight of the load to Jesus, and it is He who does all the real work.

In John 6 Andrew brings a little boy to Jesus with five small barley loaves and two small fish, with these Jesus feeds 5000. God's math is very simple: me + Jesus = More Than Enough. God is able if we simply are available. As the little boy made himself and what little he had available to Jesus, Jesus was able to feed 5000 people and had twelve baskets of leftovers. As we make ourselves and whatever we have, however little it might be, available to Jesus, Jesus is "able to do exceedingly more than we could ever ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20). Anytime Jesus is in the equation there always is more than enough.

***me + Jesus =  
More than Enough***

St. Paul teaches us that it isn't enough just to refrain from doing evil. We are obligated to help support our neighbor. "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." (Eph. 4:28) This is exemplified in the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) where the Samaritan not only attends to the man's injuries, but also pays for his recuperation and even promises to cover any future bills the man might incur. James writes, "Anyone who knows the good that he ought to do and does not do it, sins" (Jas. 4:17). If we are in a position to help someone and do not do so, we have in essence stolen from our neighbor that which God has intended our neighbor to have, namely our help and assistance. In his first epistle John tells us that it is impossible to love God and not to help people in need.

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 Jn. 3:17)

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 Jn. 4:20-21)

Jesus says that inasmuch as we help another or inasmuch as we refuse to help another, even one of the least, we have done so to Him (Mt. 25:31-46). When we pass someone on the freeway with car trouble, we in effect have passed by Jesus. When someone comes to us with a need for help with food or clothing and we say “no,” it is as if we said “no” to Jesus, and we are no better than the innkeeper who has no room in his inn for Joseph and the Virgin Mary, but who at least made room for them in the stable (Lk. 2:7). Really we are much worse than the innkeeper. It was not the innkeeper’s fault there was no room in the inn. He did what he could to make the best of a bad situation. As the man who hid the talents God gave him was condemned (Mt. 25:25-30), so will we be condemned if we do not use that which God has given and entrusted to us in love for the benefit of others.<sup>69</sup>

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (Jas. 2:14-17)

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Mt. 7:21)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other. (Jn. 15:16,17)

Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. (Rom. 12:13)

In Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal. 5:6)

***It is not enough to give at the office. “We urge you to do so more and more.”***

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<sup>69</sup> I am not suggesting that one should never say “no.” The real issue would be why one says “no” or even “yes” for that matter. If one is saying “no” because they don’t want to be inconvenienced in some way, it is sin. If one says “no” in love (much as a loving parent might say “no” to her child) in order to help a person to grow and/or to teach responsibility, saying “no” can be quite appropriate. Whatever we do needs to be done in love (1 Cor. 16:14), but we need to love wisely knowing when to say “no” and when to say “yes” (Phil. 1:9).

Now about love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you to do so more and more. (1 Thes. 4:9,10)

And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. (2 Thes. 3:13)

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (Jas. 1:22)

With these goods, then, each person can conduct himself toward his neighbor in two ways. First, with these goods he can do harm and do evil to him, or second, he can advance and benefit him. An example of the first is when one steals external goods or destroys the health of the body with blows and poison or takes from him his internal goods, such as knowledge, by seducing him into error; or virtue, by inciting him to evil, and so on. An example of the second way is when one gives him food and clothing or heals his infirmities, or protects his body, or teaches him something better and incites him to do good, and so on.<sup>70</sup>

Luther rejects the idea that good works can be performed in intention only. He feels this is a weak excuse to do nothing. He also says that good works simply done through habit are not truly good. People may have a civil righteousness (a righteousness esteemed by society in accord with the letter of the law), but the works are not praiseworthy if they are not motivated by the love of God and the love of one another.<sup>71</sup>

There is still another kind of servitude and this he calls the best of all: "By love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). It is this servitude he has in mind when he says that though he was free he made himself the servant of all. This servitude is the greatest freedom, because it needs nothing and takes nothing, but is giving and outgoing. Hence it is truly the best liberty, the liberty that is characteristic of Christian men. This is also what he has in mind when he writes in this chapter of the letter before us: "Owe no man anything but that you love one another" (Rom. 13:8). This then is the good kind of spiritual servitude: all things serve them that have it and all things work together for good to them, but they themselves are the servants of none, for, as I have stated, they are in need of none.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1951, p. 544.

<sup>72</sup> Luther, *Luther: Lecture On Romans*, p. 365.

In the above quote Luther and Paul talk of being free and, yet, of owing love. Although we owe love, our freedom is maintained. Luther felt the supreme reality of our experience is found in our living in accord with the will of God, “‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.’” (Jn. 4:34) Luther writes, “This is what determines man, not man’s will and deed.”<sup>73</sup>

Luther did not believe that people are forced to do God’s will so that it was God’s will being done over against their own. God guides our wills, but He does not force us to concede to His will. In Christ we are “transformed by a complete renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). In Christ, our wills become God’s will for us and in His will we are able to experience the fullness of life.

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (Jn. 10:10)

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (Jn. 15:9-11)

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Rom. 8:13-17)

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 Jn. 5:13-15)

***God does  
not force  
us, rather  
He  
transforms  
us.***

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<sup>73</sup> Ziemke, p. 24.

As we have seen the Christian life is one of service. We forget ourselves and in love we serve one another. We do this not because it is the most effective way of rooting out our self-dependence or pride, nor do we do it simply because it is commanded in the Bible – “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law” (Gal. 5:18). We love because we are in accord with God. We love because Christ is living in us, manifesting Himself through us. We love because it makes Spirit-sense and is Spirit-driven (Gal. 5:25).

It is in this way, then, that one takes the form of a servant, and that the command of the Apostle in Gal. 5:13 is fulfilled: “Through love be servants of one another.” Through the figure of the members of the body Paul teaches in Rom. 12:4-5 and 1 Cor. 12:12-27 how the strong, honorable, healthy members do not glory over those that are weak, less honorable, and sick as if they were their masters and gods; but on the contrary they serve them the more, forgetting their own honor, health and power. For thus no member of the body serves itself; nor does it seek its own welfare but that of the other. And the weaker, the sicker, the less honorable a member is the more the other members serve it “that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another,” to use Paul’s words (1 Cor. 12:25). From this it is now evident how one must conduct himself with his neighbor in each situation.<sup>74</sup>

Luther understood love for the neighbor as providing aid for the needs of another. Love for the neighbor was not an abstract principle without a practical meaning. Love is an action directed towards the alleviation of another’s needs. It is in this way that the Christian life and the body of Christ find concrete expression.<sup>75</sup> “It will be a right kind of love when man forgets all about himself and serves his neighbor. This is proved by members of the body wherein each one serves the other by his own risk (disregarding the risk).”<sup>76</sup>

The entire nature of the new law and its righteousness is therefore only faith in Christ. But this is not as sterile as all human opinions, because Christ lives, and not only lives, but works, and not only works, but even

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

rules. Therefore it cannot be that the believer in Christ is idle, but he lives, works, and triumphs, for works stream outwardly from faith. So our patience flows from the patience of Christ, our humility from that of Christ, and likewise all the rest, i.e. in so far as we remain solidly in faith that he does all this for us, indeed not only for us but before us.<sup>77</sup>

When I taught at Concordia University Chicago, I led a small group Bible study in my apartment for some of our University students. On the Thursday before Maundy Thursday, 2007 we were studying Romans 13:8-14.

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

It just happened that on this particular night all the students present, had been with me on our last two servant trips to the Clincho, Virginia in the Appalachia Mountains (an eight-day servant trip we had taken annually for ten consecutive years over the University's Spring Break). As we reflected upon the biblical text everyone was lamenting how when we are on a servant trip connecting to God and to each other, loving each other, living selflessly came so naturally, but once we got back to campus we quickly become self-absorbed again. Eventually the observation was made that we can lament all we want but lamenting isn't going to change anything. Do we truly believe what we read in Scripture? Do we truly believe that the same God that was with us in Virginia over Spring Break, living in us and working through us, is the same

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

God who is with us here at Concordia University Chicago with the very same power? Is there any reason we can't have the same vitality and expression of faith at this Christian university that we have on servant trips? That small group decided that night that being clothed with Jesus we were going to do what we could to create an atmosphere on campus where anyone stepping on our campus could not help but experience Christ's presence and love.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul says that we may have all sorts of gifts, but if we do not have love, we have nothing. He says that love is patient and kind, that it is not jealous, or conceited or proud; that it is not ill-mannered, selfish, or irritable, that it doesn't keep a record of wrongs and that it never gives up. He says that love is the greatest and most eternal thing. This is how love is supposed to manifest itself in our lives. This is the life of Christ.

As an undergrad, I remember my Greek professor, after we had translated 1 Corinthians 13, ask us to substitute the name of Jesus for the word love. "Jesus is patient and kind, Jesus is not jealous, or conceited or proud.... Faith, hope and Jesus remains, but the greatest of these is Jesus." Jesus is love (1 John 4:8). Without Jesus we are merely noisy gongs and clanging cymbals, without Jesus we have nothing, but with Jesus we have everything.

In 1 Corinthians 8:1 we read, "knowledge puffs a man up with pride; but love builds up." And in 1 Peter 4:8 we read, "Love covers over many sins." It is Jesus who builds up and Jesus who covers sins. If we are to grow in love, we must grow in Jesus.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!... Dear friends we are now the children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 Jn. 3:1,2)

## **Faith, Hope and Love**

*“But now abide faith, hope, love these three; but the greatest of these is love.”  
1 Corinthians 13:13*

*Faith can move mountains,  
an awesome power,  
unlimited potential,  
a simple “YES” to God.*

*Hope is the vision of faith,  
dreaming,  
foreseeing,  
grasping,  
knowing a God of Love.*

*Faith and Hope –  
so great, so majestic,  
conquering a world,  
Yet, nothing without love.*

*Love is the backbone of faith,  
in the midst of questions,  
doubts,  
problems;  
Love becomes faith’s stamina,  
giving it strength,  
endurance.*

*Love is the force of hope,  
in an insatiable caring it remains constant.  
A smiling face in the darkness of despair,  
it is like a flowing spring –  
bubbling to the surface though all around it is black,  
seeking expression until at last it finds it in a free,  
joyful flowing of utter abandonment.*

*Love is of God...everything...making all things possible.*

*Love is what I have for You, Lord!*

Bill Cullen  
October, 1979

This 1 John 3 passage is true not only in a heavenly sense, in life after death when we will see Jesus face to face; it is also true here and now. As we come to increasingly see Jesus as He is in our daily lives through the study of His Word, as we celebrate the sacraments, and as we avail ourselves of the other opportunities for growth provided by the Holy Spirit, we can increasingly become like Him even now.

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you (Gal. 4:19).

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation -but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (Rom. 8:9-16).

Therefore we fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.... (Hebrews 12:2)

### LOVE FOR ONE'S ENEMIES

God's command to love is more than "*philos*" or mutuality. It is a command to *agape*. In *agape* we are to love even our enemies, just as Christ has loved us (Rom. 5:6-8).

You have heard that it was said, "love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rains on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get: Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt. 5:43-48)

And this Christian love must be directed not to those who, reasonably speaking, are the best risks but to those who are in greatest need. Luther said; "Love does not consider its own reward or its own good, but rewards and does good. For that reason it is most active among the poor,

***Agape  
does not  
choose  
whom it  
loves, it  
just loves.***

the needy, the evildoers, the sinners, the insane, the sick and the enemies.”<sup>78</sup>

When God commands me to love the neighbor, He excludes nobody, neither friend nor foe, good nor evil. For even if man is evil and does evil to you he does not lose the name “neighbor.” He remains your flesh and blood and belongs in the commandment “Love thy neighbor.”<sup>79</sup>

This means: see to it that he who hurts you does not cause you to become like him, namely, a wicked person, nor let his wickedness defeat your goodness. For a man who changes another man by causing him to become like him, while he himself remains unchanged, is a victor over that man. No, by doing good to him, you must make him into a good person who resembles you.<sup>80</sup>

Such a love appears to be foolishness, but in truth it is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18-25). Coercion may bring about a temporary conformity of physical obedience to one’s will, but the cost is great. As one demands his or her self-centered wants and interests meaningful relationship is lost. Jesus is not looking for “conformation,” but “transformation.”

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom. 12:1-2)

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Self-interest breaks relationships. It turns people into things to be used, manipulated, and taken advantage of for one’s own sake. Love, on the other hand, binds and heals a relationship. Inasmuch as love seeks to serve, it draws people together. As has been stressed repeatedly, God’s purpose for people in both creation and in redemption was and is the

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<sup>78</sup> George Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, The American Press, New York, 1954, p. 103.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

enjoyment of love/trust relationships with Himself and with each other. This and only this results in the true abundance of life:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. (1 Jn. 1:1-4)

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Eph. 2:13-22)

Luther writes:

Thus also God converts those whom he converts by showing them his goodness. And this is the only way to convert anyone: to show him love and kindness. For a man who is converted by threat or fear is never truly converted as long as he retains this character of his conversion, for fear will cause him to hate the one who converted him. But a man who is converted by love is ablaze with self-criticism and is angrier with himself than anyone else could possibly be with him, and he is greatly displeased with himself. Moreover, it is not necessary to forbid him anything or to watch him or to demand satisfaction from him, for love will teach him all he needs to do; as soon as he comes under its influence, he will go seek out the one he offended.<sup>81</sup>

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:21)

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<sup>80</sup> Luther, *Luther: Lecture On Romans*, p. 356.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

Such love requires that we daily bear a cross (Lk. 9:23), and bearing a cross requires that we take the posture of servanthood (Mt. 20:18-28). Bearing a cross is not putting up with all the inconveniences and ills of life (i.e., getting a flat tire, developing cancer). Bearing a cross in the Christian sense is something we do with intention. A cross in the Christian sense is something we choose to pick up. Bearing a cross is choosing to take the posture of servanthood in order that we might communicate the gospel, the good news, of Jesus Christ to those in need both through our words and our deeds. Bearing a cross is intentionally acting on behalf of, and for the well-being of another; just as Jesus intentionally went to the cross to act on our behalf and for our well-being.

***Love  
requires us  
to bear a  
cross.***

In love we choose not simply to forgive our enemies, but we strive to serve them. We know the power of such love as Christ loves and serves us.

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (Jn. 13:12-17)

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (Jn. 13:34,35)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Rom. 12:1)

This love is only possible as we become free from concern for ourselves. We gain and experience this freedom as we trust in the grace of God. Luther's ethical principle is to be understood as love formed by faith. "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6).

According to Luther, all ethics, individual as well as social, must be understood from the key-principle of love. "Faith brings you to Christ and makes Him your own with all He has; Love gives you to your neighbor with all that you have." Faith and hope are man's attitudes in regard to God, but love is the resulting attitude of man towards his fellow man. But since love has its source not in man himself but in the relationship that God has established with man, it does not depend upon the reaction it elicits from the neighbor.<sup>82</sup>

### Reflections:

1. Share and discuss your thoughts and feelings regarding the Luther quote on page 77.
2. What do you understand Luther to mean by self-hatred? (p. 79-80)
3. Share and discuss your thoughts and feelings regarding the excerpt from the wedding sermon on page 81.
4. In what way(s) is love compelling? (p. 88)
5. As you reflect upon Jesus in the gospels what do you learn about love and loving?
6. React to and discuss what the author calls God's Math: "me + Jesus = More than Enough." (p. 91)
7. React to and discuss the Scripture passages the author uses to support his position. Which passage did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
8. React to and discuss the quotes from Luther and other theologians that the author uses to support his position. Which quote did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
9. What, if anything in the chapter did you most appreciate and are ready to embrace? With what, if anything, did you most disagree or would like further clarification or discussion?

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<sup>82</sup> Forell, p. 101.

**Reflections and Learnings**  
**Complete as Appropriate**

Something that excites me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something that challenges me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something I would question \_\_\_\_\_

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I most want to remember \_\_\_\_\_

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A difference this will make in my life \_\_\_\_\_

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## 5. LOVE AND LUTHER'S TWO KINGDOMS

People have depicted the two kingdoms as meaning the church and the state; however, this is only part of it. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms is three-dimensional. One dimension is indeed the relationship between the church and the state, the second dimension is between the spiritual and the secular (the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world), and the third dimension is the activity of Christians on their own behalf and on the behalf of others (vocation).

According to Luther, every Christian holds dual citizenship in two kingdoms with entirely different attributes: There is, on the one hand, the infinite spiritual "right-hand" kingdom where God has revealed himself in Christ. This is the realm of the Gospel, of grace, faith and love, a realm where God and Christ rule directly and all humans are equal. This realm is a reality in this sinful world. It becomes a reality wherever the Word is proclaimed, the sacraments are administered, and Christ forgives his followers' sins.

Then there is the secular, finite "left-hand" realm, which is also God's, however. Here, where man lives his biological life, God never reveals himself but rules in a hidden way through his "masks" – fallible humans whose errors he will eventually straighten out. In this realm of the Mosaic and natural law, there are superiors and subordinates, and crimes are punished. It functions by reason, a gift from God to man in order to find his way around this world. The relationship between the two kingdoms is not antagonistic but mutually supportive. The spiritual realm – the Church – preaches to the secular kingdom, whose rulers maintain the created order in which alone the Church can function.<sup>83</sup>

Luther felt that the church and state had distinct roles with definite boundary lines to be observed. He criticized the church of his day for trying to do that which justly falls under the auspices of the state and vice-versa. In his treatise on temporal authority, he writes "they neatly put the shoe on the wrong foot: they rule the soul with iron and the bodies with

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<sup>83</sup> Uwe Siemn-Netto, "Goodbye Utopia, Hello Luther," *The Atlantic Times*, December 2006.

letters.”<sup>84</sup> The church was to administer the grace of God through Word and Sacrament, through exercising the Office of the Keys, and through acts of charity. The state was to provide the environment through which citizens of both Kingdoms could function and be safe guarded. When the church as an ecclesiastical body got involved in civil affairs (i.e., seeking to legislate civil law), Luther felt it had overstepped its boundaries. Likewise, when the state got involved in the affairs of the church (i.e., seeking to influence religious freedom and the administration of the mysteries of God), Luther felt it had overstepped its boundaries. The individual Christian as a citizen of both kingdoms has roles and responsibilities appropriate to each kingdom. As a citizen of the church the Christian is to give witness to Jesus through word and deed (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; 1 Peter 2:9). As a citizen of the state an individual Christian may among other things vote on legislation or hold public office.

Luther felt the boundaries between the spiritual and the secular estates also must be respected by all Christians. Wherever the Christian’s own person and own affairs are concerned, the Christian is to forego law and coercion. That is, they are to do good and to endure injustices when and if they come (1 Cor. 6:1-8; Rom. 12:17-21). Christians, simply put, are to adhere to the commands of Jesus as found in the Sermon on the Mount, particularly as found in Matthew 5. However, in regard to the secular estate as a citizen of the state, if the Christian’s neighbor or community is suffering injustice, the Christian is to fight this injustice with all the appropriate means available. Luther says:

A Christian should be so disposed that he will suffer every evil and injustice without avenging himself; neither will he seek legal redress in the courts but have utterly no need of temporal authority and law for his own sake. On behalf of others, however, he may and should seek

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<sup>84</sup> Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,” *Luther’s Works, Vol. 45*, American Edition, ed. Walther I. Brandt, Philadelphia: Muhlenburg, 1962, p. 109.

vengeance, justice, protection, and help, and do as much as he can to achieve it.<sup>85</sup>

Luther also believed that within the two realms there are a multitude of offices, callings, and ranks. While one can use these callings sinfully, with a few exceptions, Luther believed they were all innately good as they are ordained by God.

Man as a member of society is part of certain orders or collectivities such as the family, the state, the empirical church and his calling. Luther asserted that this membership in the natural order was part of God's design to preserve the world and to contain the creative forces within man which under the influence of sin might lead to disorder and destruction.<sup>86</sup>

Luther tended to feel that our stations or callings<sup>87</sup> arose out of the life situations in which we find ourselves. In regard to our station or vocation Luther writes: "Therefore, where you are in a calling that is not sinful in itself, you are certainly placed there by God, and in the state that is pleasing to God; be only on your guard and do not sin in it."<sup>88</sup> We get this same sense from St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24:

Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brothers,

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>86</sup> George Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, The American Press, New York, 1954, p. 113. This is a reflection of the first use of the law.

<sup>87</sup> While it is a matter of semantics, I would define callings a little differently than Luther. For Luther vocation or calling were roles one might have in life: mother, father, sister, brother, employee, employers, butcher, baker, Indian maker, etc. For me, our "vocation" or "calling" as Christians is to love God and love others (Mt. 22:37-40; Jn. 13:34-35). The things that Luther identifies as callings/vocations, I would identify as roles through which Christians live out their calling to love (1 Cor. 16:14; Eph. 4:1,16).

<sup>88</sup> Martin Luther, *Church Postils, Luther's Works*, Vol. 22, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 1956, p. 248.

each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

Luther did not hold one station to be above another station in value.<sup>89</sup> He is much more concerned with how we behave within our stations than he is about what our stations are.

Reflect on your condition, and you will find enough good works to do if you would lead a godly life. Every calling has its own duties, so that we need not inquire for others outside of our station.<sup>90</sup>

God cannot bear to see anyone neglect the duties of his calling or station in life in order to imitate the works of the saints. If therefore a married woman were to follow Anna in this respect, leave her husband and children, her home and parents in order to go on a pilgrimage, to pray, fast and go to church, she would do nothing else but tempt God, confound the matrimonial estate with the state of widowhood, desert her own calling and do works belonging to others.... Good works should be done, and you ought to pray and fast, but you must not thereby be kept from or neglect the duties of your calling and station.<sup>91</sup>

Douglas Schuurman in his book *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* elaborates on duties within callings or stations when he writes:

Martin Luther expresses a feature central to Protestant vocation when he limits the scope of Jesus' command to "Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you? (Matt. 5:42). According to Luther, "Christ is not telling me to give what I have to any scoundrel that comes along and to deprive my family of it or others who may need it and whom I am obliged to help, and then to suffer want myself and become a burden to others." Instead, because parents have a calling to meet the needs of their children, they have a moral obligation not to give to others what God has entrusted to them to meet the needs of their own children. According to Luther, giving essentials to beggars would be theft: stealing from one's own children and giving it to others. The more general principle behind Luther's advice is that we have a special obligation to meet the needs of those brought near by God's providence through our various callings. Beneath this principle is trust that God's providence has

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<sup>89</sup> Although Luther did not value one station above another, he did believe different stations did carry with them differing amounts of authority, requiring obedience by the subordinate be in the home, in one's employment or in the state.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 281. See also Mark 7:9-13 where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and teachers of the law for neglecting care for aging parents under the pretense of giving to God.

placed us within our callings, and that duties of love are to be given structure by the refracted obligations of our callings.<sup>92</sup>

Luther rightly opposes a spirituality that leads others, in God's name to neglect their own parents, spouse, and children for the sake of the monastery or humanity "in general." The proximity of the needs of those nearby combines with the availability of resources to place priority on service to those close at hand when there is a definite conflict. And service to those nearby need not exclude others that are more remote. Through loving those close, and through receiving their love, God's love and care spreads to the benefit of all creation. Though there is no room for self-love in Luther's view, there is room, indeed a sacred obligation, to give treatment of the needs of one's children and dependents when they conflict with the needs of those who do not stand in such a special relation.<sup>93</sup>

One could read St. Paul this way as well where he writes: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Gal. 6:9-10)

### **LOVE AND OBEDIENCE IN THE FACE OF UNJUST AUTHORITY**

As has been said, both realms or kingdoms belong to God and are to be governed by His love (1 Cor. 16:14). Although parents, masters, and government officials are to exercise their authority in wisdom and in love, they do not always do so. In his lectures on Romans Luther points out that being a Christian will not free us from oppression. However, we are not to complain in our oppression. It is wrong to oppress, but as there is no one righteous before God, no oppression we endure is undeserved. In our oppression God's grace comes to us,

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<sup>92</sup> Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2004, p.87-88.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91-92. People like John Howard Yoder and Leo Tolstoy would strongly object with Luther on this point. They would argue that to obey Jesus' command to "love one another as I have loved you" does not allow such preferential treatment. See Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

strengthens us, and provides for our growth (Rom. 5:1-5). In our individual lives we are to endure the conditions, imposed by secular authorities as they present themselves (Rom. 8:28).

Calvin and Luther understood vocation within the context of a social hierarchy they believed to be grounded in God's creation and providence, and so expressive of the will of God. Superordinate persons (husbands, fathers, princes) are to rule subordinate persons (wives, children, subjects) with wisdom and love. Subordinate persons are to obey the will of superiors, even when harsh or unreasonable. Only when a superior requires subordinates to violate the will of God should they disobey authority. In their disobedience to authority, Christians are not to rebel but to be subordinate, enduring the sufferings caused by their refusals to obey superiors even as Christ endured the cross.<sup>94</sup>

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Rom. 13:1-7)

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 103-104

doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. (1 Pe. 2:12-23)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose .... What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:28-39)

In our oppression we still have Christ, and in Christ we have everything we need: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:11-13). As Christians we should bear oppression in love in order that the oppression might be overcome, and the oppressor might be won over by our love.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:17-21)

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Pe.3:13-18)

Christians must always ask themselves, "What form of love is most applicable in this situation – to endure injustice or to demand justice?"<sup>95</sup> In this regard St. Paul can write:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1)

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Gal. 5:13)

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:19-23 )

***We cannot choose the Kingdom we will live in. We must live in both.***

### **GOD'S KINGDOM IS A KINGDOM OF LOVE**

God's kingdom is first and foremost a Kingdom of love. St. Luke writes: "Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you'" (Lk. 17:20,21). The kingdom of God is not a matter of geography. It is a matter of reign. The kingdom of God exists wherever God's love reigns. To the

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<sup>95</sup> Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1966, p. 9.

extent the love of God reigns in and governs our lives to that extent the kingdom of God exist within us. Luther in explaining the second petition of the Lord's Prayer writes:

What does this mean?

Answer: To be sure, the kingdom of God comes of itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us.

How is this done?

Answer: When the heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit so that by his grace we may believe his holy Word and live a godly life, both in time and hereafter forever.<sup>96</sup>

***The Kingdom of God exists wherever God's love reigns.***

The bottom line for a Christian is never an issue of rights.

The bottom line for a Christian as a citizen of God's kingdom is always centered in the issue and question of love. Paul in Acts 16:1-3 has Timothy circumcised right after he has just won a big

battle in Jerusalem (Acts 15) where it was determined by the Council of Jerusalem that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised (become Jews) in order to become Christians. Timothy had the "right" not to become circumcised, but Paul and Timothy, in freedom and in love, freely chose not to exercise Timothy's rights so as not to put an unnecessary obstacle between their Jewish audience and the gospel message they were proclaiming.<sup>97</sup> As Christians our bottom-line question is not: "What are my rights?" rather our bottom-line question is: "What does love dictate? What will best advance the kingdom and the gospel?"

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal. 5:13-14).

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to

<sup>96</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959, 346.

<sup>97</sup> In true freedom one is free to choose not to exercise his or her rights. The one who "must" exercise his or her rights is not truly free (see also 1 Cor. 9:3-18).

win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (1 Cor. 9:13-22)

It is only the realization and participation of Christ in us that enables us to truly live in both kingdoms. Forell writes, "For Luther only faith could guarantee ethical action."<sup>98</sup>

### Reflections:

1. What comparisons and contrast can you draw between Luther's two Kingdoms and Scripture's use and understanding of the Kingdom of God?
2. What does each Kingdom look like? What does it mean to live as a citizen of each Kingdom?
3. What implications does Luther's two Kingdom have for us concerning our vocations?
4. React to and discuss the Scripture passages the author uses to support his position. Which passage did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
5. React to and discuss the quotes from Luther and other theologians that the author uses to support his position. Which quote did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
6. What, if anything in the chapter did you most appreciate and are ready to embrace? With what, if anything, did you most disagree or would like further clarification or discussion?

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<sup>98</sup> Forell, p. 79.

**Reflections and Learnings**  
**Complete as Appropriate**

Something that excites me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something that challenges me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something I would question \_\_\_\_\_

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I most want to remember \_\_\_\_\_

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A difference this will make in my life \_\_\_\_\_

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## 6. CRITICISMS OF LUTHER'S ETHIC

### *Overwhelmed*

*Overwhelmed!*

*What can I say about my God?*

*I seek to express the love and joy flooding me,  
in the revelation and knowledge with which He touches me,  
the revelation and knowledge of Himself –  
the completion and fulfillment of all things.*

*Yet, in my effort to express I have not found the words,  
majestic enough,  
telling enough,  
for He who is the great "I AM."*

*Left with clichés and trite phrases and adjective,  
my very being mounts with inexpressible thanksgiving.*

*So consumed by the love of Christ,  
my being in its every action and word seeks to become a humble gesture of a responsive love to a stimulus of  
love.*

*However, even here in my thanksgiving, it is Christ my Lord who lives and acts.*

*No, Christ is not the most important thing in my life,  
nor do I live my life for Christ –*

*Christ is my very life itself, and He lives for me, as He lives in me, through me.  
I am Christ's body and He my life.*

*O Praise the Lord!*

Bill Cullen  
May, 1980

There are primarily two criticisms of Luther's ethic. The first criticism is that Luther's ethic has more of a dispositional nature, rather than an objective nature. The second criticism concerns his doctrine of the two kingdoms and the Christian's responsibility to the state.

### **THE DISPOSITIONAL NATURE OF LUTHER'S ETHIC**

As we have seen throughout this manuscript, Luther's ethic is dispositional in that he focuses upon our being positioned in Christ and Christ in us, a work of grace, through which we are transformed. Luther's ethic, in being an ethic of faith, concentrates upon what God in Christ does for us, in us, and through us. We are now new creations. We have a new disposition. As new creations positioned in Christ, we now seek to and are enabled to live lives of love.

The ethic of Christians, for Luther, is basically a Gesinnungethik, an ethic of disposition; it is not first of all a new external law of life . . . . "Putting on Christ according to the Gospel, consist not in imitation, but in a new birth and a new creation .... Now Christ is no law, no lawgiver, no work; but a divine and an inestimable gift."<sup>99</sup>

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." . . . . "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (Jn. 3:3-6)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. (2 Cor. 5:17)

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal. 3:27)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Pe. 1:3,4)

Faith, which is open to the future, expresses itself through love, which in an unexplained way needs no assistance from "Objective ethic." In vain one looks for even the simple use that Luther makes of Christ as our example, giving a shape and form to man's response to the neighbor's need. God's gift in Christ is one of radical freedom which requires an obedience, but faith and love are sufficient to determine the actions. "The man of faith understands his position as one who comes out of a sinful past and therefore stands under God's judgment, but also as one who is freed from his past, by the grace that encounters him in the word." Faith "is the momentary act in which he lays hold of himself in his God-given freedom." In this freedom one can serve Christ in love, but "naturally, for one who stands in love, an 'ethic' is no longer necessary, however much brotherly admonition, such as Paul himself practices, can point out to another his responsibility and show him what he has to do." "The man of faith is free to love, which opens his eyes to what God requires of him in the moment."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> James Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life*, Harper and Row, New York, 1968, p. 125.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Objective ethics concentrates on looking at the life of Jesus, which then becomes the model for our behavior. Jesus is our teacher and example.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ. (Phil. 1:9,10)

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5:1,2)

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:42-45)

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (Jn. 13:34,35)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2)

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 Jn. 3:1,2)

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (Jn.13:15)

John Howard Yoder in his book *The Politics of Jesus* is an example of someone who advocates objective ethics—our teacher, role-model, example.<sup>101</sup> Personally, I believe both the dispositional and objective nature of Christian ethics are necessary. Without the objective

***Jesus is not the most important thing in my life, nor do I live my life for Jesus. Jesus is my life, and He lives His life for me as He lives in me and seeks to live His life through me.***

<sup>101</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1972.

nature of Christian ethics our actions, although done with the best of intention, will be ill-informed. “This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.” (Phil. 1:9-11) It is also related to what is commonly referred to as “the third use of the law—that of a teacher or guide. We see this in Psalm 119:105. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Without the dispositional nature, we may know the proper expression of love, but we will lack both the motivation and the power to love. This relates to what I like to refer to as the “third use of the gospel”—the gospel of empowerment.<sup>102</sup>

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (Jn. 15:1-8)

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13)

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<sup>102</sup> Three uses of the law are commonly recognized among Christians: 1<sup>st</sup> use of the Law is as a curb to curb us from our naturally tendencies to go “out of bounds” (1 Tim 1:8-10). The power behind this use is consequences – good verses bad. The 2<sup>nd</sup> use of the Law is a mirror exposing to us our sin (Rom. 7:7-13; Gal 3:24). This use of the Law shows us our need for a Savior. The 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the Law is that of a teacher and guide, teaching us God’s will and God’s ways (Ps. 119:105), but as a Law in and of itself it leaves us powerless to do so. To these uses I have added three uses of the Gospel (commonly practiced in the church, but less commonly identified). The 1<sup>st</sup> use of the Gospel is where God invites us to take off our mask and to be real and honestly with ourselves, with others, and with Him, while at the same time assuring us we will still be loved and forgiven (1 Jn. 1:7-9). The 2<sup>nd</sup> use of the Gospel is the assurance of God’s love and salvation. God had promised if we took off our mask He would still love and forgive us. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> use of the Gospel He does just that. He expresses His “in spite of” love and forgiveness. The 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the Gospel is a Gospel of empowerment. Having experienced God’s forgiveness, we want to live according to His will, but feel helpless in doing so (Rom 7:15-25). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the Gospel God provides empowerment. What He expects of us, He, now through His Spirit, indwells us to Himself do through us (Jn 15:4-5; Gal 2:20; 2 Pe 1:3-4).

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12,13)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal. 3:27)

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. (Gal. 4:19)

If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law .... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal. 5:18, 25)

Although I wish Luther had been a little more objective in his ethic, I greatly appreciate his dispositional depth, and I would agree with Luther that the key to living the Christian life of love is dispositional in nature, that is, it is through His indwelling presence through His Spirit.<sup>103</sup> However, I also believe that Luther is not purely dispositional any more than Yoder is purely objective. In his theology of the cross Luther demonstrates very vividly how we must pattern our lives after the life of Jesus.

The discipleship in suffering, however, is nothing else but following the cross. Since the cross stands in the midst of Christ's life, the Christian's life is a discipleship of suffering. The idea of suffering in the theology of the cross does not rest on cosmological and metaphysical presuppositions, but is oriented to a concrete event . . . . In the theology of the cross suffering is understood throughout theologically, not anthropologically, that is, not on the basis of reflection on human nature, but on the basis of God's revelatory activity in history. Christ's cross and the Christian's cross belong together (W. XXXI, 2, 165, lff; LW16,229f; W.X2,171,23ff; LW27,133f).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> For a very rich exposition on the dispositional nature of Christian ethics (not particularly Lutheran) read the works of Chinese Christian theologian and pastor Watchman Nee, particularly his books: *The Normal Christian Life*; *Sit, Walk, Stand*; and *Christ the Sum of All Spiritual Things*.

## LUTHER'S TWO KINGDOMS

In the second criticism Luther is accused of seeking to maintain the established order to such an extent that injustices or unjust social order are not challenged. This, at least in part, is probably a valid criticism. Luther had great respect for the role government and others in authority play in society. Luther believed these people have been gifted and called by God. Our rulers have a responsibility. A ruler:

. . . must give consideration and attention to his subjects, and really devote himself to it. This he does when he directs his every thought to making himself useful and beneficial to them; when instead of thinking, "The land and people belong to me, I will do what best pleases me," he thinks rather, "I belong to the land and the people, I shall do what is useful and good for them. My concern will not be how to lord it over them and dominate them, but how to maintain them in peace and plenty." He should picture Christ to himself, and say, "Behold, Christ, the supreme ruler, came to serve me; he did not seek to gain power, estate, and honor from me, but considered only my need, and directed all things to the end that I should gain power, estate, and honor from him and through him. I will do likewise, seeking from my subjects not my own advantage but theirs."<sup>105</sup>

However, even when rulers do not live up to their responsibility, Luther believed it is necessary to respect their God-given authority.

Concerning rebellion . . .

Luther said they had no right to do so. According to Scripture, he concluded, there are no circumstances under which a Christian may rebel against his government even when it acts unjustly: "Rather, a Christian ought to endure oppression and injustice, especially at the hands of his government." The fact that the emperor acts unjustly does not abrogate his imperial authority or absolve his subjects of their duty to obey, as long as the empire and the imperial electors treat him as their emperor and do not dispose him.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1976, p. 119,120.

<sup>105</sup> Gustafson, p. 126.

<sup>106</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. by Robert Schultz, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1972, p. 128.

Some, therefore, interpret Luther as saying we have no recourse other than to accept injustice which is condoned by the state. I believe this is a misinterpretation of Luther. Luther believed injustice should be confronted, but that it should be addressed through established channels.

To re-quote Schuurman:

Calvin and Luther understood vocation within the context of a social hierarchy they believed to be grounded in God's creation and providence, and so expressive of the will of God. Superordinate persons (husbands, fathers, princes) are to rule subordinate persons (wives, children, subjects) with wisdom and love. Subordinate persons are to obey the will of superiors, even when harsh or unreasonable. Only when a superior requires subordinates to violate the will of God should they disobey authority. In their disobedience to authority, Christians are not to rebel but to be subordinate, enduring the sufferings caused by their refusals to obey superiors even as Christ endured the cross.<sup>107</sup>

***For  
better  
or  
worse  
Luther  
believed  
in the  
system.***

Even though there may be evil rulers, Luther believed in the system. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Rom. 13:1). Yet, Luther did himself challenge the system and authorities of his day:

Luther did not "submit" to papal authority or quietly endure the penalties imposed by the pope. He wrote and spoke in ways nothing short of revolutionary, and in ways that advanced far-reaching political and social change. When criticizing parents for forbidding their children to marry, Luther limited parental authority and advised children to disobey parents. The limits of parental authority are (a) it must accord with God's word and command, and (b) it must conform to the purpose of parental power; namely the child's nurturance and salvation. Since marriage is a divine ordinance, willed by God and structured into the very fabric of creation, it is contrary to God's will to forbid marriage. Parents contradicting these bounds "are to be regarded as if they were not parents at all, or were dead; their child is free to become engaged and to marry whomsoever he fancies."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 103-103. See also 1 Peter 2:13-23.

<sup>108</sup> Schuurman, p. 111.

Unless I am convicted by Scriptures and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God, I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me, here I stand. Amen.<sup>109</sup>

The bottom-line is “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

When the government exceeds the limits of its authority and seeks to compel us to act contrary to God and his word – for example, to deny or to oppose the truth of the gospel – then Luther asserts on the basis of Acts 5:29 that our duty to obey has come to an end. Christians are obligated to obey the government only in terms of the government’s assignment to care for this physical life, not in matters relating to the word of God and of faith. A government which demands obedience in these matters has therewith ceased to be a government established by God.<sup>110</sup>

As Christians we live in and assume responsibility in both kingdoms. As a member of both realms, the Christian should participate in the government. Luther writes, “it belongs more appropriately to Christians than to any other men on earth.”<sup>111</sup> Bornkamm writes:

Thus Christians and non-Christians are bound together in the same responsibility, from which neither can withdraw. But because through the Holy spirit Christians are enlightened and renewed and can understand, from the experience of grace, that the severity of God is nothing other than his love, they are called and qualified above all others for the service in secular government.<sup>112</sup>

In the realm of God’s grace we are truly free, “a perfectly free lord of all subject to none.”<sup>113</sup> In the realm of the world we are subject to those authorities which are over us, and we have an obligation of love to participate in our particular calling in the world with all the potential which God has given to us, “a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Bergendoff, Conrad, *The Church of the Lutheran Reformation: A Historical Survey of Lutheranism*, Concordia Publishing House, 1967, p. 45.

<sup>110</sup> Althaus, p. 126.

<sup>111</sup> Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1966, p. 7.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>113</sup> Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 7.

## REFLECTIONS

I appreciate Luther's ethic which can best be described as an ethic of love through faith which frees us from sin, both the consequence of sin and the power of sin, in order that we might be free for God and for others in love.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:8-10)

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal. 5:13,14)

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 Jn. 4:18)

This faith also releases the power of Christ as He indwells us.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen, (Eph. 3:16-20)

God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Col. 1:27-29)

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

In Christ we have the forgiveness of sin, and thus we have a freedom and liberty which paves the way of love. Through faith, we experience the indwelling of Christ, and this love becomes a dynamic reality (Gal. 5:6).

The love which is Christian faith in action must be part of the divine love given to man by God in order that man may pass it on to his fellow man. For Luther, the love which is faith active towards the fellow man was a gift of God. He considered man merely the tube or channel through which God's love flows.<sup>115</sup>

**Love is  
Christian  
faith in  
action.**

This we have by faith; i.e., we have already, logically speaking in a potential way, as our possession the actual performance of the deeds of love for the neighbor. The potentiality becomes actuality then in the nature of the faith relationship, in the nature and structure of itself, i.e., in the movement of faith. Faith is the personal attitude, not static but mobile, which causes commitment and action to flow first to God and then to the neighbor. This is the case because it belongs to the nature of faith to exist outside of itself since faith overcomes the sinful tendency of self to serve only itself.<sup>116</sup>

While I appreciate Luther's ethic, at the same time, I wish he had focused a little more upon the example of Jesus' life as being a model for our own. It is only as we examine the life of Jesus in detail that we can begin to fully understand, appreciate, and live the radical nature of love. It is in Jesus' example that we come to see what love is, what it looks like.

I also appreciate the fact that Luther acknowledged the potential of civil authority for good. However, I wish he had done more reflection upon its equal (if not greater) potential for evil. Luther's seemingly over-confident belief in the state for me clouds his ethic of love.

On the one hand, Luther knew that the Christian who refuses to obey the government when it orders him to transgress God's commandment or to deny the truth of the gospel will get into trouble. Under some circumstances he may even be required to make very great sacrifices. The government will not tolerate disobedience and will punish it. The Christian must

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<sup>115</sup> George Forell, *Faith Active in Love*, The American Press, New York, p. 99.

then be prepared to make any sacrifice. “In such cases we should indeed give up our property and honor, our life and limb, so that God’s commandments remain.” The Christian is forbidden to resist his government actively.<sup>117</sup>

On the other hand,

Luther recognized that a prince when acting as a prince is a “political person,” that is, he does not act in his own behalf but fulfills his official duty of protecting his subjects. A prince is therefore not limited simply by the commandment of the Sermon on the Mount, which forbids every Christian to resist evil. As a result, Luther no longer proposed to exercise a definitive theological veto in case the princes decided, on the basis of legal reasoning referred to above, to resist the emperor with force. He made them responsible for their own decision and left it up to their judgment and conscious. “I will let them do it, I am not responsible.” At the same time, however, Luther leaves no doubt that the true Christian attitude would be to depend on God’s assistance and to avoid resistance as unnecessary.<sup>118</sup>

***We must  
obey God  
rather than  
men.***

It would appear that there are times when Luther either would seek to avoid responsibility for his actions, or there are times when the end justifies the means. Here I would disagree. In my mind we always bear responsibility for our actions and the end never justifies the means if the means runs counter to the ethic of love. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom. 12:21) In accord with Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative’s second formulation that we are to “so act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end in itself, never as a means only.”<sup>119</sup> In other words, the means must also be viewed as having an end in itself—namely, that of being good or evil.

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<sup>116</sup> Donald Ziemke, *Love for the Neighbor In Luther's Theology*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1963, p. 61.

<sup>117</sup> Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, p. 130.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>119</sup> Judith A. Boss, *Analyzing Moral Issues*, McGraw Hill, New York, 2005, p. 25

**Reflections:**

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the two main criticisms of Luther's ethic of love?
2. Do you identify more with the dispositional (indwelling) or the objective (teacher/example) nature of Christ? Which do you appreciate the most? Explain.
3. What responsibility does a Christian have to confront injustice including the injustices of civil authorities?
4. React to and discuss the Scripture passages the author uses to support his position. Which passage did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
5. React to and discuss the quotes from Luther and other theologians that the author uses to support his position. Which quote did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
6. What, if anything in the chapter did you most appreciate and are ready to embrace? With what, if anything, did you most disagree or would like further clarification or discussion?

**Reflections and Learnings**  
**Complete as Appropriate**

Something that excites me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something that challenges me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something I would question \_\_\_\_\_

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I most want to remember \_\_\_\_\_

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A difference this will make in my life \_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

### *What Joy*

*Thank You, what else can I say,  
Thank You!*

*Jesus, You know when I look at myself it is a real bummer.  
I see myself and all I see is weakness, fault, sin.  
My heart – the new nature You have given me seeks to love You and others,  
yet, my old nature seeks to satisfy and promote itself.  
The only good in me is You, Jesus!*

*The only good in me is You!  
I guess that is the point though – isn't it.  
I am indeed weak – full of faults and sins,  
but you Jesus, You are strength, perfection, and love,  
and You are in me.*

*Yes, that is indeed the point!  
I am weak,  
You are strong.  
And You have given me a new nature in and of Yourself!  
You have given me Yourself!*

*In my new nature I share in Your strength, perfection, and love,  
In my new nature I have Your strength, perfection, and love  
In my new nature I possess You, Jesus,  
I possess You and thus I possess, I have everything!*

*All I need do is keep claiming this nature You offer,  
All I need do is claim You and grow in You.  
To grow in You is to grow in strength, perfection, and love.*

*The joy of it.  
It is a joy beyond all measure.  
What can I say, but "Thank You!"*

Bill Cullen  
April, 1982

The implications for today of Luther's understanding of the ethic of love are many and far-reaching. I would like to focus upon just three of these implications in this chapter. First, Luther's understanding of the ethic of love is incarnational in its nature. Second, Luther's understanding of the ethic of love negates an us/them mentality as it makes everyone a part of the "us." And third, Luther's understanding of the ethic of love stresses commitment over and above feeling.

## INCARNATIONAL

Luther's ethic of love is incarnational first in that we experience and are transformed by God's love most profoundly through the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God .... The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . . From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (Jn. 1:1, 14, 16, 17)

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:8)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins .... And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. (1 Jn. 4:9, 10, 14-16)

And second, it is incarnational in that as we have experienced it and are transformed by it, He is now incarnate in our own lives. Incarnation is not simply about Jesus becoming a human being 2000 years ago. Incarnational theology is also about Jesus continuing to take flesh through His Body the Church (through Christians both individually and collectively). Jesus is not simply "Christ for us." He is also "Christ in us" and "Christ through us for others."

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal. 3 :27)

***Luther's  
ethic of love  
is  
incarnational***

***Jesus  
continues to  
be incarnate  
today  
through His  
Body, the  
Church.***

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you. (Col. 1:27)

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one... As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (Jn. 17:15,18)

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:20)

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. (Col. 1:24)

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Lk. 9:23)

Martin Franzmann has written:

The Gospel is radical in three respects: (1) In its recognition of the condemning law and wrath of God and the guilt and lostness of man; (2) in its recognition of the sole working of God in man's salvation; (3) in its recognition of the transformation of man's existence produced by the saving act of God.<sup>120</sup>

If humanity had some redeeming quality about itself, something deserving to be saved in itself, the Gospel would not be all that radical because God should have saved us because "we're worth it." If I contributed to my salvation in some way, the Gospel again would not be all that radical because, now I merit or at least have put down a down payment on salvation. Or if the Gospel leaves me in the same pitiful state of sinfulness in my basic nature in Adam, it again would not be all that radical. The Gospel is radical precisely because it does fully comprehend my total depravity and lostness in myself, yet it embraces me anyway. It embraces me, not because of whom I am, but because of who God is (1 John 4:9-10). The Gospel is radical

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<sup>120</sup> This quote is taken from a paper Dr. Franzmann wrote which was adopted in 1969 as the position of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and was commended to the church for study and guidance.

because in it God doesn't say "Meet Me halfway," nor "Meet Me a quarter of the way," nor even "Meet Me a tenth of the way;" rather God in His Gospel meets us 100% of the way (Romans 3:23-25; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 John 2:2). And the Gospel is radical because it doesn't leave us the same. It transforms us step by step into His image as Jesus through His Spirit is formed in us (2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 3:27; Galatians 4:19; 1 John 4:11-16).

### **Incarnate, Yet In Process**

Mike Yaconelli in his book *Messy Spirituality* addresses the unfinishedness of our transformation. He writes:

Spiritual people also admit their unfinishedness. Unfinished means incomplete, imperfect, in process, in progress, under construction. Spiritual describes someone who is incomplete, imperfectly living their life for God. The construction site of our souls exposes our flaws, the rough-hewn, not-finished faith clearly visible in our hearts. When we seek God, Jesus begins to take shape in our lives He *begins* a good work in us, he starts changing us, but the finished process is a more-than-a-lifetime process. The work of God in our lives will never be finished until we meet Jesus face to face. The author of Hebrews wrote, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter [or finisher] of our faith." Spirituality is not about being finished and perfect; spirituality is about trusting God in our unfinishedness.<sup>121</sup>

I would agree with Yaconelli. We are an unfinished product (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; Phil. 1:6; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 Jn. 3:1-2), and we will always be an unfinished product until we see Jesus face to face. Jesus does now live in us (Gal. 2:20) and we are now fully Christian (1 Jn. 3:1). We cannot become more Christian than we already are, however, we can become more Christlike than we are. As Jesus becomes more fully formed in us (Gal. 4:19) we increasingly are transformed into His image, exhibiting His character, and doing what He does (Rom 12:2; Gal. 5:22-

***Jesus today  
has no  
hands but  
ours, no  
feet but  
ours, no  
voice but  
ours.***

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<sup>121</sup> Michael Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2002, p. 29.

23).

While we are unfinished projects, what I would like to focus upon and emphasize, and what I believe Jesus would have us focus upon and emphasize, is that although we *are* projects, He *has begun* a good work in us. Jesus, through His Spirit, is at work, working *in* us and working *through* us for others (Jn 15:4-5,8,12,16-17; Phil. 2:12-13). Even now in our imperfection He will and is using us (Jn. 21:15-17; Eph 4:1,16; Phil 3:12-16).

### **Incarnate For Mission**

Luther's ethic of love, based in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, suggests that the chief way Jesus continues to love today is through His Body the Church. Mother Theresa of Calcutta has said: "Jesus has no hands but ours. He has no feet but ours. He has no voice but ours."

Luther says:

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. This he should do freely, having regard for nothing but divine approval.

He ought to think: "Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 29, 30.

Practically, both individually and collectively, we who are Christians need to do as Jesus did in His incarnation 2000 years ago. In His incarnation Jesus took the initiative. He left His comfort zone of heaven and entered into our hurting world. In our world He did not stay in the temple or the synagogue, instead He went to the marketplace. He traveled among the Gentiles in Samaria. He touched lepers. He associated with tax collectors, prostitutes, and with all other sorts of sinners. He responded to the pains of body and soul. He says:

It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. (Mt. 9:12,13)

Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: "The kingdom of heaven is near." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (Mt. 10:6-8)

The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. (Lk. 19:10)

We must ask ourselves: "What does it mean to be the church?" "Why does the church exist on earth?" These are important questions. Is church something we go to (a building or a worship service) or is church something we are (the body of Christ), His incarnation in the world today? I am fully convinced that Jesus would have us primarily see ourselves as the incarnation of His presence in the world today. We are not symbolically the "Body of Christ." We are the "Body of Christ." We are the way Jesus is incarnate and physically present in the world today (Eph. 1:22-23).

A verse of Scripture I love to share with Christians, particularly those within my own faith tradition (the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod), is Colossians 1:24 where Paul writes: "in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (NRSV). What is Paul saying here? What was lacking in Christ's affliction? Is Paul suggesting that Jesus did not do it all? Is Paul suggesting that Jesus' suffering, death, and

resurrection were insufficient for our salvation? Is Paul suggesting that there is something he must do to be saved, and thereby suggesting that there is something I must do to be saved? Is this the same Paul who wrote “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9)?

Of course, Paul is not suggesting that Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection were insufficient for the work of justification, of salvation. That to which Paul is referring has nothing to do with the “work of justification” (1 Cor. 2:2), but it has everything to do with “the proclamation of salvation” and tangibly bringing Jesus’ love to bear upon human lives. It is through His Body, the Church, His incarnation in the world today – “Us” – that Jesus continues to touch lives in order that people might experience the life, salvation, and restoration that He has obtained for them.

***We need to get out of our comfort zones and get into ministry.***

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. (Rom. 10:14-17)

For those of us who are Christians, His ambassadors, and His incarnation in the world today, we like Jesus, need to move beyond our comfort zones of family, friends, home, church building and church fellowship. We need to take the initiative and go to where the hurt is. We need to be doctors for the sick, seeking and bringing salvation to the lost.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> I highly recommend Greg Finke’s book *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary*, TENTHPOWER Publishing, 2014 as a tool for learning and living missionally in your present circumstance, in your everyday lives.

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (Jn. 17:15-18)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:17-20)

It is easy to excuse ourselves in the shallowness of our commitment and service. We quickly and correctly acknowledge that we are not Jesus, but we fail to acknowledge that even though we are not Jesus, that Jesus seeks to and does incarnate Himself *through* us. He does live *in* us to love *through* us (2 Cor 5:17-20; Eph 3:20).

As our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christian.<sup>124</sup>

We tend to think "it was easy for Jesus, He was God." As Jesus was and is God, we might almost unconsciously feel that Jesus took His comfort zone with Him. Not so! It was not any easier for Jesus than for us (Heb. 2:14-18; Heb. 4:15-16). Jesus was not only fully human as well as divine, but He also carried a load far heavier than any we will ever bear. He carried (paid) the penalty for all the sins of the world (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Jn. 2:2). In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was in such agony that He sweated blood and cried to His Father, "If there be any other way." Almost pleading, "Please let there be another way." "Take this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will but may Your will be done" (Lk. 22:42). On the cross, not only did Jesus feel the full

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 30, 31.

burden of all our sins, but He also knew what it meant to be completely forsaken by God, His heavenly Father (Mt. 27:46). The same Jesus who overcame sin, death and the devil 2000 years ago is the same Jesus that indwells us today in order that we might experience the same victory today. Just as Jesus was human as well as divine, so are we not only human, but we are also “partakers of the divine nature” (Rom. 6:3-13; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Pe. 1:3-4).<sup>125</sup>

As Christians we need to be intentional in ministry and we need to pick up our crosses of servanthood daily. As we read John’s Gospel we hear Jesus say:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” (Jn. 13:12-15)

In Luke’s Gospel Jesus further tells us:

That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much more will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Lk. 12:47,48)

And in James we read:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (Jas. 1:22)

## Love Compels

Love compels us to get out of our comfort zone and to go to wherever there might be need, regardless of personal feelings and in spite of impending danger. “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died

***When Jesus tells us to take up our cross He is not talking about enduring the misfortunes of life, but about intentionally serving others even in personal discomfort.***

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<sup>125</sup> I am not suggesting that we will experience the same victory over temptation that Jesus did, but I am suggesting that in Christ we have the potential to overcome any temptation at any given moment in time.

for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Cor. 5:14)

This love flows out of our faith that God loves us, that God knows what He is doing, and that God is with us to enable us in our calling (Mt. 1:23; Mt. 28:20).

The Lord appeared to him from afar, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness.” (Jer. 31:3)

The foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength. (1 Cor. 1:25)

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3 :20,21)

Again, we hear Luther’s words:

A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. 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.<sup>126</sup>

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.<sup>127</sup>

And the Apostle Paul writes: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love” (Gal. 5:6).

Very frequently this love which takes us beyond our comfort zone will appear to the casual observer “mere foolishness.” But then we remember Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians. 1:18-25,

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 35, 36.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles; but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1 Cor. 1:18-25)

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

#### **At the Heart of the Issue:**

There are three questions each of us must ask ourselves. First we must ask: "Do I, or to what extent do I, trust God?" Second, we need to ask ourselves: "Do I care? Do I really care about people, their hurts, their pains, and do I care about the fact that so very many are currently on their way to hell?" And the third question, if we answer "yes" to the first two, is: "What is God calling me to do?" Someone once said:

I can not do everything,  
but I can do something,  
and what I can do,  
by the grace of God I will do.    Author Unknown

***Jesus, I  
trust, I  
care; what  
would You  
have me  
do?***

If we are to be about incarnational theology in the world today (fleshing out Jesus' presence and love), the church's mode of operation is going to have to change and change

generally comes hard. Again, both as a church body and as individual Christians, it means leaving our comfort zones.

### **A New Paradigm for a New Day:**

Kennon Callahan, a church growth leader, believes that we in the United States once lived in a church culture where people greatly respected and turned to the church most any time they needed help or assistance. However, in his book *Effective Church Leadership*, he writes, “The day of the church culture is over. The day of the mission field has come.”<sup>128</sup> He states that:

. . . unchurched culture is marked by three factors:

1. The value of church is not among the major values of the culture.
2. A substantial number of persons are not seeking out churches on their own initiative.
3. By and large, persons live life through as though the church did not substantially matter .

...More to the point, no major cultural value says that the church is important.

In an unchurched culture, people do not necessarily view the church as harmful or hurtful. Rather, people simply view the church as not particularly relevant or helpful.<sup>129</sup>

Callahan further states, “On a mission field, leadership is best understood as focusing outside, in the world—not inside, in the church.”<sup>130</sup> He identifies the following as distinguishing marks of a congregation which understands itself as a mission outpost as opposed to one which operates as if we were still living in a church-culture:

#### **Mission Outpost**

1. focus on the relational characteristics
2. living at the edge of its resources
3. in the world

#### **Church-Culture Local Church**

1. focus on the functional characteristics
2. conserving and holding its resources
3. in the church

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<sup>128</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership*, Harper and Row, 1990, p. 13. Many others such as Bill Easum, Reggie McNeal, Leonard Sweet, and Brian McLaren in their writing make similar observations.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19,20.

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|--|---|
| 4. fulfillment of foundational life searches           | 4. pleasant programs and activities                                     |
| 5. value of leadership post:<br>external and missional | 5. value of leadership posts:<br>internal and institutional             |
| 6. God's missionaries                                  | 6. a caste system of professional ministers and<br>laity <sup>131</sup> |

Like Callahan, I believe if we are to practice incarnational theology today we need to be operating as a mission outpost. (See Appendix III.)

### EVERYONE IS "US"

The second implication of Luther's ethic of love which I want to address is the fact that in his ethic there is no real room for an "Us" vs. "Them" attitude. Everybody is to be considered "us," and we are to have the same consideration and concern for our worst enemy as we have for our closest friends, our family members and even ourselves.

God our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4)

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable (1 Cor. 12:21,22).

Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by admonishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (Eph. 2:13-16).

*Everyone is  
"Us"*

You have heard that it was said, "love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get: Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt. 5:43-48)

Allow me to repeat some quotes of Forell:

And this Christian love must be directed not to those who, reasonably speaking, are the best risks but to those who are in greatest need. Luther said; “Love does not consider its own reward or its own good, but rewards and does good. For that reason, it is most active among the poor, the needy, the evildoers, the sinners, the insane, the sick and the enemies.”<sup>132</sup>

When God commands me to love the neighbor, He excludes nobody, neither friend nor foe, good nor evil. For even if man is evil and does evil to you he does not lose the name “neighbor.” He remains your flesh and blood and belongs in the commandment “Love thy neighbor.”<sup>133</sup>

We see this “Us” vs. “Them” mentality throughout our culture and throughout our world. The slogan “Buy American” would reflect such a mentality. Basically, this mentality suggests that we think of ourselves or of mine first (be it my family, my church, my town, my state, my country, etc. – in essence *storge*). Scripture on the other hand tells us, “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor. 10:24). We cannot love anyone unconditionally (*agape* love) unless we love everyone equally.<sup>134</sup> As soon as we choose to love one and not another, or one above another, we have imposed a condition for loving the one and not the other. Jesus, commands us to love one another as He has loved us—unconditionally (Jn. 13:34-5). Mind you, “love” is different than “like.” *Agape* love is commitment. We are to be equally committed to people’s well-being. Like is a feeling and we are not commanded to feel the same about everyone.

**Love is  
different  
that like**

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<sup>132</sup> George Forell, Faith Active in Love, The American Press, New York, 1954, p. 103.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>134</sup> Note, these thoughts more closely reflect John Howard Yoder and Leo Tolstoy than they would Martin Luther. Luther would agree in theory, but in practice he would say that since we all live with limited resources we need to attend first to our stations or vocations and the responsibilities that accompany those stations and vocations – Mk. 7:9-13; Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim 5:3-4 (see footnote 88 and 89).

Our enemy or adversary is not to be consider “them,” neither individually nor collectively. We are all God’s creation. Jesus has died for us all, redeemed us all and broken down any dividing walls (Eph. 2:13-22). We are all “us.” Our enemy or adversary is that which would keep us apart.

This understanding of love erases exclusiveness in business, race, color, and in a way even creed. In creed we as Christians do not exclude others. We constantly extend to all others an invitation and we seek to share with everyone whatever we have, especially our faith (Acts 3:6). People, however, may exclude themselves by refusing to receive what Jesus offers, thus refusing to join in our fellowship and missing many, if not all, of its blessings.

### **Living in a Global Village:**

As Christians we constantly invite and seek to include everyone as a part of “us” (Lk. 19:10). Our invitation needs to begin with listening (Jas. 1:19). It has been said “God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason – we should listen twice as much as we speak” (Irish Proverb). In order for our invitation to truly be inviting we need to know the pains and hurts that people feel. We need to know and not assume their need. As we seek to include everyone, we also are to strive to share everything we have according to the needs of others.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. (Acts 2:44,45)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32)

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (2 Cor. 8:2-5)

***Quick to  
listen, slow  
to speak***

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Mt. 25:34-40)

Robert McAfee Brown writes:

. . . It is the task of peacemaking Christians to insist that we think and act as citizens of the global village:

The good news, of course, is that we don't have to search frantically for a place to start building the global village. That is already a given. It is provided by the community, the church, of which we are a part . . . It is itself already a foretaste of the global village, with members from every race and class and nation. It proclaims a God who is not the God of the few, or even the God of the many, but the God of all. There is no way such a God can be claimed as the privileged possession of whites or Americans or Republicans or males.<sup>135</sup>

He further writes:

A global context is the true context in which we are called upon to live; if we denied it, we would be in trouble. The fact of the matter is that we do deny it, and we are in trouble .

. . . We are Christians and we are Americans. Living in the global village calls us to be Christians first and Americans second; indeed, that is the liberating statement of the good news. But in actuality, we are usually Americans first and Christians second; that is the burdensome reality of the bad news.

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<sup>135</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, *Making Peace in the Global Village*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1981, p. 20, 21.

If we are to be Christians first and Americans second, what will that demand of us specifically? It will demand that we see the world through eyes other than our own, through the eyes of the poor and dispossessed, the eyes of the starving and despairing. And it will similarly demand that we listen to the world through voices other than our own, the voices of the oppressed who are despairing and angry and strident. The exercise can only be initially threatening.<sup>136</sup>

In the United States the “great American dream” seems to be to have at least a little more, to be at least a little better off next year than we were this year.

According to the EIA (Energy Information Administration), in 2018 the USA had less than 5% of the world population, but 18% of the world’s energy. If we are to live

Luther’s ethic, perhaps most of us should have the dream or goal of having a little less next year than this year. Yes, we can all point out those who are better off than we are and ask, “What about them?” Jesus, however, wants us to ask questions about our own stewardship.

Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me” (Jn. 21:21-22)

Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. (1 Thes. 4:9-10)

And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. (2 Thes. 3:13)

### **COMMITMENT**

The final implication for today of Luther’s ethic of love that I want to explore is what this ethic says about commitment. In our society commitment seems to be at an all-time low, be it commitment to people, to values, or to institutions. This lack of commitment is seen in everything from the ever-growing number of divorces to the lack of volunteer service (unless, of course, it also meets some personal need or interest – “me”ism), to erratic church

***The  
American  
dream?  
God's  
dream?  
Your  
dream?***

attendance and declining church (as well as other institutional) membership. George Barna writes:

Baby Boomers ... are as likely as not to dismiss the denomination in which they grew up as a viable option for consideration as they search for a church home ... Rather than find, attend, and support a single church, these adults are selecting several churches that have the ability to satisfy different aspects of their personal needs. On any given Sunday they choose which church to attend on the basis of which one will address their most keenly-felt needs on that day. Loyalty? Theirs is to self more than to the church. The church is increasingly seen as a place which provides service, rather than providing an outlet for one to serve.<sup>137</sup>

(Americans) will become even more self-centered, more materialistic, more driven to play. While we will value relationships, most of us will be too selfish to make the hard commitments and sacrifices that facilitate any meaningful relationships.<sup>138</sup>

In the process of redefining what counts in life, many of us have decided that commitment is not in our best interest. Traditional concepts such as loyalty and the importance of membership in various groups have been thrown out in favor of personal interest and self-preservation . . . . Commitment is viewed negatively because it limits our ability to feel independent and free, to experience new things, to change our minds on the spur of the moment and to focus upon self-gratification rather than helping others.<sup>139</sup>

More than ever, Americans...refuse to settle for anything less than exactly what they want.<sup>140</sup>

Commitment is an important word to relationships and to effective ministry.

Commitment is not a matter of feeling, nor does it have any basis in feelings.

Commitment enables us to hang in there even when we don't feel like it, even when

hanging in there is the last thing we want to do. Commitment is a matter of choice. It is

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 22, 23.

<sup>137</sup> George Barna, *The Church Today: Insightful Statistics and Commentary*, The Barna Research Group, Glendale, CA., 1990, p. 28.

<sup>138</sup> George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle*, Regal Books, Ventura, CA/, 1990, p. 25.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 33, 35

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

a decision, in spite of feelings. Commitment can be relied upon. Commitment is an expression of *AGAPE* love.

However, as much as we might wish differently, commitment cannot be simply commanded. Our commitment to God and to others flows out of our knowledge of and our trust in God's commitment to us (1 Jn. 5:3-5). To grow in commitment one needs to grow in Christ. Our knowledge and our relationship with Jesus transforms us and grows our commitment (Rom. 12:2; 1 Jn. 3:1,2). It is as we grow in our YADA knowledge (knowledge based in personal experience) of Jesus that we will be free enough from ourselves that we can and will freely commit to others.

The questions each of us must ask ourselves are:

1. To whom or to what, if anyone or anything other than myself, am I committed?
2. Is or how is my commitment to Christ and others finding expression in my life?
3. What am I doing or what can I do to grow in my knowledge and my experience of Christ in order that I might also grow in both commitment and Christian service?

**Question?**  
**To what**  
**are we**  
**willing to**  
**commit?**

Joshua challenges us with these words:

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. (Josh. 24:14,15)

In concluding, I am reminded here of a little children's ditty. It is entitled "The Voice of God" and was written by Louis I. Neumen.

I sought to hear the voice of God,  
And climbed the topmost steeple  
But God declared: "Go down again,  
I dwell among the people."

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" He will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (Mt. 25:34-46)

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 Jn. 4:20,21)

May we always remember that ascending to God involves a descending to people. Amen!!!

### Reflections:

1. The author suggests that Jesus continues to be incarnate in the world today through His Body the Church. Do you agree? Explain. What thoughts and feelings do you experience as you contemplate this?
2. Do you see yourself as an "everyday missionary" called to complete what was "lacking in Christ's affliction" (2 Cor. 5:17-20; Col. 1:24)? Explain why or why not.
3. Where and how do you see an "us" vs. "them" mentality expressing itself in our world? ...expressing itself in the church? With what results? What would be different if we viewed everyone as "us"?
3. What is your understanding of the difference between love and like?
4. What does it mean to you to commit? To what are you committed? How does your commitment manifest or express itself.?
5. React to and discuss the Scripture passages the author uses to support his position. Which passage did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.

6. React to and discuss the quotes from Luther and other theologians that the author uses to support his position. Which quote did you find most significant or relevant? Explain.
7. What, if anything, in the chapter did you most appreciate and are ready to embrace? With what, if anything, did you most disagree or would like further clarification or discussion?

**Reflections and Learnings**  
**Complete as Appropriate**

Something that excites me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something that challenges me \_\_\_\_\_

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Something I would question \_\_\_\_\_

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I most want to remember \_\_\_\_\_

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A difference this will make in my life \_\_\_\_\_

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