

Our Continuing Challenge: To Work With The Word That We May Be Salt And Light.

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A weary and dejected messenger of God sat alone with his fears in the barren region of Horeb. He had zealously served his Lord. He had faithfully proclaimed God's message. From what he could observe, it appeared his efforts were in vain. This faithful servant of God was so dejected that he wanted to die. That man of God was Elijah, who served as God's prophet to Israel from about 875-850 B.C., during the reign of the infamous Ahab and Jezebel.

Elijah had lost confidence in the power of God's word to effect change in the human heart. Thus, the Lord acted to shore up Elijah's faith. He showed Elijah that his word does not work in a dramatic, outward way, like the power of a fire, earthquake, or strong wind. Rather, like a gentle whisper, God's word is at work in people's hearts. Quietly, often imperceptibly, the Holy Spirit does his work, converting hearts, sanctifying lives, preserving faith. Even though Elijah could not see it, God was at work in people's hearts. God's word had not been proclaimed in vain. He told Elijah, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18).

How often I have sat alone in the privacy of my own study, thinking the thoughts of Elijah, I do not care to count. I suppose that I am not alone in this matter. All who serve in the public ministry are faced with the temptation to become discouraged when the results of one's work are not evident. How thankful we can be that God has recorded this incident in Scripture for our comfort and edification. Rather than throwing stones at Elijah, let us learn from this account where to turn when we face discouragement. Let us turn to our God and his word. In that word he reveals to us both our sin and his grace. Through that word he strengthens and equips us to serve as his messengers in a world which desperately needs the message we have to proclaim.

Our continuing challenge is to work with God's word that we may be salt and light in a world of sin and spiritual darkness. That we may be spiritually refreshed and that we may be better equipped to work with the unique tool of God's word is the purpose of this symposium. In our opening session we shall then consider:

OUR CONTINUING CHALLENGE: TO WORK WITH GOD'S WORD THAT WE MAY BE SALT AND LIGHT.

- I. THE CHALLENGES: PAST AND PRESENT
- II. THE INSTRUMENT FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGE: THE WORD.
- III. THE CONFIDENCE WE HAVE IN CARRYING OUT THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S WORD.

I. THE CHALLENGES: PAST AND PRESENT

When sin entered the world, God's good creation was corrupted. People do not love God the way they should. Therefore, they do not love each other the way they

should. Sickness, sorrow, suffering, death, and all the other ills which plague this sin-corrupted world make it what the hymnwriter calls a “vale of tears” (TLH 97:2). How do we react to this? The old adage, “How do you see the glass—half empty or half full?” is applicable to our topic. Shall we wring our hands in anguish, bemoan the sorry state of the world, and withdraw from it as much as possible? Or, shall we see in the problems around us challenges and opportunities for service? With God’s help we will echo the words of Eliza Alderson who wrote, “Yes, the sorrow and the sufferings which on every hand we see Channels are for gifts and offerings due by solemn right to Thee” (TLH 442:4).

By God’s grace, the church in past ages rose to meet the challenges it faced in the world. In spite of formidable problems, God’s people proclaimed his word and ministered to his people. A brief survey of some of the challenges the church faced in the past will help us make an application of Solomon’s statement, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The challenges we face are challenges people have faced before. With the hymnwriter we may say, “Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod” (TLH 658:2).

The Old Testament prophets had the challenge to hold before God’s people the promise of the coming Savior. The uniqueness of their prophecy will be dealt with in a later paper. Our purpose here is to note that they had no easy task. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem, he said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.” Stephen said before the Sanhedrin, “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One” (Acts 7:51-52).

The 40 years of Israel’s wilderness wanderings is a record of Moses’ dealings with a rebellious and grumbling people. God called Moses to lead Israel from Egypt to Canaan. The travel conditions were harsh. Since God was not visible to take complaints, the people dumped them on his servant Moses. At Kibroth Hattaavah, an exasperated Moses complained to the Lord, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?...I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin” (Numbers 11:11, 14-15).

A survey of the ministries of other Old Testament prophets will reveal a similar pattern of difficulties encountered proclaiming God’s word. Samuel grew up in a time when “the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions” (1 Samuel 3:1). The priesthood was stained by the indulgence of Eli and the wicked behavior of his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The people worshiped the fertility cult gods of their heathen neighbors. The Philistines were a constant threat to Israel. Samuel was called upon to lead a reformation in Israel in the face of these problems. Elijah and Elisha served at a time when the “sins of Jeroboam” (1 Kings 12:26-33) and the wholesale apostasy of Ahab and his family plagued Israel. Isaiah started and finished his ministry during the reigns of two of the worst kings of Judah. Ahaz and Manasseh did more to lead Judah astray than all their predecessors combined. According to tradition, Isaiah was killed during the reign of Manasseh (687-642), of whom it was said, “Manasseh shed so much

innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end” (2 Kings 21:16). In addition, Isaiah also lived through the ravages of the Assyrian devastation of Judah.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel were caught up in the turmoil of world events. Assyria had taken the kingdom of Israel into captivity and ravaged Judah (the fall of Samaria: 722 B.C.; Sennacherib’s destruction of Lachish: 701 B.C.). Then, the Babylonians loomed on the horizon as God’s sword of judgment on his people. Nineveh fell to Babylon in 612 B.C. Jeremiah’s task was to announce to Judah the impending destruction of Jerusalem. This was a message which would brand Jeremiah as a traitor in the eyes of Jerusalem’s rulers and people. In view of the difficulties Jeremiah faced in his ministry, the Lord said to him, “Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you” (Jeremiah 1:18-19).

When God called Ezekiel to minister to God’s people in captivity in Babylon (592 B.C.), the Lord said, “The house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate. But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 3:7-8).

In spite of opposition, God’s messengers proclaimed his word. The Psalms extolled the virtues of meditating on God’s word (i.e., Psalms 1, 19, 119). Isaiah declared, “When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (Isaiah 8:19).

The prophets did not proclaim God’s word in vain. The Lord preserved a remnant of his people. He carried out his promise concerning the Messiah. God’s Son came into the flesh, lived, died, and rose again for our salvation. God accomplished his mission. The record of the Old Testament prophets tells us that God’s people met the challenges they faced by faithfully proclaiming God’s word.

However, more challenges lay ahead of God’s people. The spread of Greek culture through Alexander’s conquests and the Roman domination of the Mediterranean world created a series of new challenges for God’s people to face as they went out into the world with the gospel. Our Lord had commissioned his church to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). This was a monumental challenge for a small group of disciples. Besides the enormousness of the challenge, they faced an environment hostile to the message they proclaimed. One need only study the history of Paul’s missionary journeys to get an idea of what ministry was like in Paul’s day (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Yet, Paul could declare to the Colossians, “But now he (God) has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant” (Colossians 1:23).

In the church’s early history it struggled not only to proclaim the gospel but to preserve it in its purity. In order to ward off the Trinitarian and Christological errors, the

church labored to reflect accurately the teachings of Scripture concerning the Trinity and the person of Christ. The trials Athanasius encountered as he testified against the Arian error are indicative of the challenges faced by faithful witnesses to God's word. (Athanasius, 293-373, went into exile five times because he would not bow to the whims of the Imperial Court.)

As the church moved into the Middle Ages, Neo-Platonic speculation, Aristotelian logic as employed by scholasticism, mysticism, and the authority of the church created an atmosphere which stifled the word of life. God used Luther to proclaim again the word of life in its truth and purity. The trials Luther encountered as he faithfully testified concerning God's word are well known. His hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," reflects the confident faith of the Reformer as he faced the challenges which God had placed before him. As Luther set forth the truth of God's word, the Lord enabled him to steer the course between the Scylla of Calvinism and the Charybdis of Arminianism, which afflict the church to this present day. In opposition to those who advocated an "inner guidance," Luther directed people to the words of Scripture.

The church from Luther's day to the present has faced a myriad of challenges, all of which threaten the vitality of the gospel. Orthodoxy (dead orthodoxy, a religious intellectualism), pietism (17th century Germany: Spener [d. 1705], Francke [d. 1727]), rationalism (Schleiermacher [1768-1834], Ritchl [1822-1889], Paulus of Heidelberg [d. 1851]), liberalism (Feuerbach [d. 1872], Baur [d. 1860]), the social gospel (Gladden [d. 1918], Rauschenbusch [d. 1918]), existentialism (Kierkegaard [d. 1855]), neo-orthodoxy (Barth [d. 1968], Brunner [d. 1969], Bultmann [d. 1976], Niebuhr [d. 1971], Tillich [d.1967]), the historical critical method, (Astruc [1766], J. G. Eichorn [d.1827], Graf [d. 1869], Wellhausen [d. 1918], Dibelius [d. 1947]), unionism (cf. the Prussian Union [1817], the modern ecumenical movement, W.C.C.), fundamentalism [1919, World's Christian Fundamentals Association, 1923; J. Gresham Machen's Christianity and Liberalism; Jerry Falwell [Liberty Baptist College]; Bob Jones University) and neo-evangelicalism (Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Ca.; Carl Henry, Christianity Today, 1956; Billy Graham) all present threats to the life giving gospel of Jesus Christ. In America, our forefathers faced the challenges which resulted from the aforementioned theological philosophies. Men like C.F.W. Walther, Franz and August Pieper, Adolph Hoenecke, John Meyer, and Carl Lawrenz stand out as those who have led the Lutheran church through difficult times. Walther led the church in giving a decisive answer in the election controversy of the 1880's. The Piepers and Hoenecke did monumental service for the church in the areas of dogmatics and exegesis. Meyer and Lawrenz guided our Synod through the difficult times during the break-up of the Synodical Conference.

In this year, who could forget the courageous action of those men who met in June of 1917 at the Aberdeen Hotel in St. Paul. They agreed they could not, for conscience sake, join the merger of the old Norwegian Synod, the United Church and the Hauge Synod. They could not accept the Opgjor, or Madison Settlement, which allowed to stand two different teachings on election. On June 14, 1918, they met at Pastor H. Ingebritson's Lime Creek, Iowa, congregation and formed the ELS. This year they will celebrate the 75th anniversary of their founding.

The church has faced challenges throughout its history. However, we should note that our challenges are not all in the area of refuting error or formulating correct doctrinal statements. The challenges are also there to minister to God's people in the midst of the

situations in which they find themselves. In discussing theology as a “*habitus practicus*” (active aptitude), John Meyer noted:

Dogmatics, in the first place, is the “active aptitude” of exhibiting and substantiating the doctrines of the Scriptures...To teach does not stop with the transmission of doctrines to the intellectual grasp of the hearers but culminates in their training in the practical application of the truths for both their inner and their outer lives...If anyone is interested in Christian dogmatics, whether he teaches it or studies it, merely for the sake of a purely theoretical grasp of the Scripture doctrine, he abuses the term dogmatics. Dogmatics does require also a “theoretical aptitude” (*habitus theoreticus*), but is essentially nothing less than an “active aptitude” (*habitus practicus*) which includes not only the readiness to teach and defend, but to apply to life, yes, to suffer for the establishment of the doctrine (Meyer, J, “Theology As An Active Aptitude”, *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, pp. 8-10).

Commenting on the importance of knowing what is doctrine, Harold Wicke wrote:

The question is important—very important—for you and I want to know what we shall say to a man who, like the jailer at Philippi, cries out: “What must I do to be saved?” To a young man seeking to control the passions of his body and asking, “How can a young man keep his way pure?” (Psalm 119:9). To parents standing at a small grave and asking, “Why did God permit this? What has now happened to our baby?” To the woman on her hospital bed who has just been told that she will never walk again and now asks: “Does God hate me? Is he punishing me for my sins?” To the criminal whose conscience finally fully awake cries out: “Is there forgiveness for me?” To my little boy, who, having watched the science fiction programs, asks, “Who made all these things? How old are they?” How futile our answers unless we can say: “Thus saith the Lord!” or “According to the Scripture” (Wicke, H., “What Is Doctrine,” *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p. 68).

In addition, as we apply the word to people in their special circumstances, how important it is that we speak out of the fullness of our own heart. Yes, the word of God is efficacious in and of itself. It does not depend on the faith of the presenter for its validity. But we can certainly place obstacles in the way of the word if we come off sounding canned or on automatic pilot. One of the finest treatises I have read on the matter of heartfelt working with God’s word is August Pieper’s “The Book Of Job In Its Significance For Preaching And The Cure of Souls” (*Our Great Heritage*, Vol. II, pp. 127ff). Writing concerning the matter of speaking the word in love, Prof. Pieper states:

Elihu? Precisely this is his great fault: he offers suffering Job no true sympathy, no compassion, no love. He has grasped the true doctrine; he

hits upon the proper word; he teaches the way of God correctly. No fault can be found with any of this. But correct knowledge has puffed him up...As a person, he plays the role more like that of an actor who is less concerned about making poor Job's burden more tolerable or helping him get rid of it than he is about showing himself to be the man who understands things better than anyone else. And we conjecture that this is the reason why Elihu is so totally isolated in the book of Job. He walks on stage, speaks, walks off—and disappears. Job doesn't answer him. He cannot refute his words; they have taken no effect upon him. Therefore, he lets them pass over him—and remains silent. He is seeking a sympathetic heart; he is longing for compassion....That is what he seeks in preference to all expressions of comfort and instruction. That is what he has failed to find in all the fine discourses of Elihu.

Even God himself finds nothing to reprove in Elihu's discourses as he does in those of the three friends. But neither does he find anything to praise. He, too, passes over them in silence as though they had never been uttered, as though they were insignificant. Elihu was as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, for he had no charity.

Here is truly a great and important lesson for the pastor (and any other called worker as well) to learn. That pastor is no man after the heart of God who indeed knows what is proper to say to the suffering and sorely tried and instructs them with irrefutable correctness but who at the same time is lacking in heartfelt compassion, innermost sympathy, and genuine love for those in misery (Pieper, A., Op. Cit., pp. 164-165).

Our Savior displayed the consummate heart of compassion toward those he taught. On one occasion, when Jesus had withdrawn for rest, the multitudes followed him. Mark records, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things" (Mark 6:34). May our Lord ever give us a heart that reflects his love as we respond to the opportunities for service which he places before us.

When I was training for the work of the ministry, the Fifth Dimension was singing, "This is the dawning of the age of Aquarius, harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding...Peace will guide the planet and love will steer the stars." A companion song advocated, "Let the sun shine in." When I began my ministry, I found the age of the Vietnam Conflict had dawned instead of the age of Aquarius. Indeed, there was a definite need to let the "Son" shine into people's lives. Timothy Leary was advocating turning on with drugs. The antiwar protestors were chanting, "Make love, not war," as they waged war on the establishment. The counterculture of the hippie movement encouraged people to drop out, and the Beetle's guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, encouraged the people to tap into Hindu religion. A generation of young people were confronted by an anti-establishment, free love, drug culture which was inimical to the Christian faith. Young people struggled to grow up into mature Christians in this setting. They struggled with going to fight and die in an action that was never declared a

war. Parents struggled to cope with a world which had changed radically from the time they grew up. In such an environment the challenges to minister to God's people were great and rewarding.

Today the Vietnam conflict seems like ancient history to the students we teach, and perhaps to us also who lived through it. Those of us who grew up during that era find we face new challenges in the world today. Young people face some of the same challenges faced by previous generations, but in greater proportions and more imminent ways. The drug problems of the 60's and 70's have mushroomed into a scourge on our land in the 90's. STD's are epidemic in proportion. Violence is commonplace, not merely on the streets of our cities but even in the schools and homes of our land. The family unit is breaking down. Training of the young in the home is scarce. We are dealing with a generation where many have learned their attitudes toward life from Axl Rose, 2 Live Crew, Prince, Freddy Kruger, Jason, Lethal Weapon, and the Terminator.

Teachers in the classrooms minister to many children who come from single-parent homes. They deal with children who have been traumatized by physical or psychological abuse, alcoholism, and incest. They deal with problems caused by parents and children who do not practice self-discipline. Pastors deal with myriads of problems in the home caused by substance abuse, sexual immorality and marital infidelity. Workers in the church serve people who judge their workers by strictly secular standards.

As we face these challenges, let us not forget to thank God for the opportunity to serve these people in their hour of need. Instead of writing them off or giving them the brush off, let us remember the example of our Savior, of whom Isaiah wrote, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Isaiah 42:3). These people are in need of our ministry. They are opportunities for service to our Savior. Let us work to build them up in faith and life with the word of God.

Let us also thank God for the many dedicated Christians with whom we have the privilege to work. They are blessings from God whom we have the privilege to serve. Remembering they are blessings will help us avoid a "crepe hanging" mentality which paints everyone and everything with the same brush. Then the challenges we face will not immobilize or isolate us. Rather, they will move us to action as we move forward to minister with God's word.

The world is in a sorry state. But, that is all the more reason we will press on with our work. Students of DMLC, you are needed. There is a need for teachers to present a program of education with Jesus Christ as the focal point and which is guided by God's word. There is a need for teachers to be examples for children who lack role models for their lives. There is a need for teachers who are compassionate and caring, who lend an ear, extend a helping hand, offer reassurance, comfort, and encouragement. There is a need for teachers for our young people in the high schools and academies, to equip the next generation of the church to live as salt and light. There is a need for pastors who proclaim the word, pointing out both sin and grace, and who counsel people with the word of God, giving them spiritual guidance, peace, and strength. There is a need for shepherds, for wherever you look in the world people are like sheep without a shepherd. There is a desperate need for the message God in his grace has given to us.

One thing I hope takes place at this symposium is that those in the ministry will visit with those preparing for the ministry. What an encouragement for those studying for the ministry to hear words of encouragement from those already serving. When called

workers get together with their comrades in arms, the temptation is present to focus on their “war stories” and the “horrors” which they have faced. Those preparing for the ministry need to know that this is not all the ministry is about. The ministry of the word is full of joy, full of great spiritual rewards and challenges. Let those of us called into the ministry reflect on the many privileges and blessings God has given us. Let us share our joys with others, for their encouragement and comfort.

The challenges we face may seem overwhelming. Yet, let us consider the record of God’s saints in the past. They went forward to meet the challenges of the day, armed with the sword of the Spirit. We too will do the same, for God’s word is the one instrument which meets the world’s desperate needs.

II. THE INSTRUMENT FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGE: GOD’S WORD.

The word is essential for our ministry because it alone meets the universal needs of all people. The Bible is the only book which tells the truth both about man’s sin and his salvation. It is only from the word of God that we learn the real truth about ourselves. The Bible reveals that all people begotten in the natural way are born with sin (Psalm 51:5). The result of this sin is that all people by nature are spiritually blind (1 Cor. 2:14), dead (Ephesians 2:1), and the enemies of God (Romans 8:7). Because of this inborn sin we daily do what God tells us not to do and omit doing what he tells us to do. We deviate from God’s will in thought, word, and deed. We have failed totally to carry out God’s will (Romans 3:23). Because of sin, all people are under God’s wrath and deserve eternal punishment (Galatians 3:10; Ephesians 2:3). Left to ourselves, we would perish eternally. It is only from God’s word that we hear the good news of our salvation. Jesus Christ is the center of the word. All of Scripture revolves around him. Through the word God reveals to us the good news that in love he sent his Son into this world to save us (John 3:16). Jesus took upon himself our flesh. He lived the life that we cannot live. He died the death we deserve to die. He paid for our sins in full. God acquitted the world of guilt because he committed Jesus to carry our guilt for us. In the gospel God tells us this good news. Through the gospel the Holy Spirit converts, sanctifies, and preserves us in the faith.

The universal problem of all people is that they are sinners and need a Savior. Jesus Christ is the only Savior. We cannot save ourselves. No other person can save us. Only Jesus could and did save us from our sins. Only through faith in him will we stand safely before the throne of God.

Sin is the root of all problems in this world. Thus, we need to work with the word, to share that word, for only then will people find out the truth about themselves and their relationship with God. All man-made religions teach salvation by human effort. All people by birth have the idea they can settle their account with God. Only the word of God reveals the total helplessness of human beings to do a single thing to save themselves. Only the word reveals the Father’s love in sending his Son to save us.

People hurt from sin. The lie of the devil that sin is enjoyable is shown to be false, not only by Scripture, but also by the realm of human experience. Sinful behavior must be repented of, warred against, crucified. This is painful, but this is necessary. A surgery is not enjoyable, but is necessary to save the life the patient. The scalpel of the law is necessary to cut out the tumors of sin which threaten eternal death.

The gospel is the balm of Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul. There is no sweeter message on earth, no more life giving or comforting words than the news that God loves us and has forgiven us our sins. We will continue to work with the word, because it is the only instrument to meet the challenges placed before us by the ravages of sin.

The word is the answer to the challenges we meet because it is good for all people of all ages. Times and people change. Situations differ. But the word remains the same from age to age. In Genesis 15:6 we read, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." 2000 years after Abraham the Apostle Paul cites this passage (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6) as an evidence that we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ. As we look back on Paul's statement written 2000 years ago, and on Moses' statement written some 1400 years B.C., we may have the same confidence Paul, Moses, and Abraham had in their day. We too are confident that through faith in Jesus Christ we have forgiveness, righteousness, and everlasting life. God says what he means and he means what he says. In any age, to the end of the age, we may base our faith on the solid foundation of God's promises contained in his word. Our faith will always have a solid foundation.

The reason the Bible is good for all people of all ages is because it is God's word. The Bible is unique. It did not come about by the will of man, but by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Yes, there is a human element involved. People did research (Luke). Written records were utilized (Kings). People wrote to deal with specific problems (Galatians, 1 Corinthians). People's languages, styles, and vocabularies were utilized. However, God supplied the impulse to write, the message to convey, and the words to convey the message. As Paul wrote, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16). Scripture is so reliable that a single statement taken in its context (Gen. 15:6, Romans 4:3), a singular form (Genesis 12:7, Galatians 3:16), a single word (Psalm 82:1, John 10:35), and even a first person singular form (Psalm 110:1, Matthew 22:44) is enough to establish a doctrine. Because Scripture is God's word, because it is God-breathed, it is reliable in any age to equip the child of God for faith and Christian living.

Of course, as we study the word, we must distinguish what was meant for one person at one time (Paul's advice to Timothy to drink a little bit of wine for his stomach problems - 1 Timothy 5:23) and what is applicable for all people of all ages (John 3:16). Here the Lord has not left us in a state of uncertainty. Scripture is its own interpreter. We must let Scripture speak for itself.

As God speaks to us through the Bible, he does so in clear language which even a child can understand. Writing on the clarity of Scripture, Carl Lawrenz stated:

The clarity which Scripture ascribes to itself is, first of all, an outward clarity. It consists in this that in the words and sentences of intelligible, comprehensible human language Scripture clearly expresses all the truths which God has been pleased to reveal to us and which we need to know for our Christian faith and life now and for our eternal salvation hereafter...Any rational being who reads and studies the statements of holy Scripture, who carefully marks and notes the meaning of the words which Scripture employs, the grammatical construction with which these words

are joined together in sentences, the figures of speech...if any, in which the statements are clothed, and the immediate or wider context and setting in which these statements are found will have to say: This and this alone is what Scripture is stating here. He will have to say this even though he may not accept what Scripture is saying (Lawrenz, Carl, "The Clarity of Scripture," *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p. 189.)

Prof. Lawrenz continued by citing Luther's statement:

For even if I were a Turk, a Jew, or a heathen who thought nothing of the Christian faith, and yet heard or read this scriptural account of the Sacrament, I would still have to say: "I do not believe the Christian doctrine, of course, but this I must admit: if they wish to be Christians and maintain their doctrine, they must believe that Christ's body and blood are physically eaten and drunk in the bread and wine" (Op. Cit., Vol. 1, p. 191).

This approach to the Bible we call the historical-grammatical approach. Commenting on the grammatical nature of this approach, Dr. Siegbert Becker wrote:

To understand what God is saying to us, according to the grammatical method, we need to study the meaning of the words in their ordinary biblical usage. When we have discovered what the words mean, we know what God wants to say to us. What the words say is then accepted as God's truth.

Concerning the historical nature of this approach, Dr. Becker wrote:

(Referring to the last point above) It is particularly this last point that we have in mind when we call it the historical-grammatical method. Above all else that term means that in the Bible we have true history, a true account of what was said and done. The historical-grammatical method assumes that the men who claim to have written the Bible really wrote it at the time they claim to have written it. It assumes that the people who are spoken of in Scripture really lived and really did the things described unless there is something in the context itself that compels the reader to think otherwise.

Luther in his commentary on Genesis gives us a concrete example of what we mean by a historical-grammatical interpretation. At the beginning of his commentary he emphasizes repeatedly that Moses is writing history when he speaks of creation and the fall. In his comments on Genesis 3:14 he writes,

I adhere simply to the historical and literal meaning, which is in harmony with the text. In accordance with this meaning, the

serpent remains a serpent, but one dominated by Satan; the woman remains a woman; Adam remains Adam, just as the following events prove (AE 1:185) (Becker, S., "The Historical-Critical Method Of Bible Interpretation," *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. 1, p. 274).

We will continue to work with Scripture because it contains the instruments which God has given the church for carrying out its mission. The mission of the church is "Make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-20). The tool Christ has given us to carry out this mission is the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). As we carry out our Lord's commission, we will use the law in the service of the gospel. The continuing challenge of the church is to maintain a proper distinction between the law and the gospel. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The proper distinction between law and gospel separates the Christian faith from all man-made religions. This same distinction separates Evangelical Lutheran theology from all other churches' teachings. A confusion of law and gospel has dire consequences. Souls are harmed when law and gospel are confused.

As we work with the word we will proclaim both law and gospel in their undiluted form. We will be careful lest we soften the blow of the law by minimizing the sinner's responsibility for his actions. The old adage that "God loves the sinner but hates the sin" does not square with the psalmist's declaration, "You hate all who do wrong" (Psalm 5:5). This is the law in its full force. In a book entitled *Teaching the Law and the Gospel* William Fischer wrote:

We must, however, teach the law of God so that the children feel the full impact of its condemnation. They should learn that they are by nature lost and condemned creatures, that they have not kept God's commandments, and that "the soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:20). Only then are their sinful hearts properly prepared to receive the comfort of the gospel. When children are taught that they have repeatedly broken all of God's commandments and that they deserve nothing but God's temporal and eternal punishment, they will despair of trying to earn salvation by keeping God's law (Fischer, Op. Cit., *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. III, p. 241).

At the same time we assert God is angry with the sinner, we also assert the gospel truth that God loves the sinner. Though the two statements are paradoxical, both are true. They meet in harmony at the cross of Christ. We need to assert both in the interest of the sinner. We need to keep law and gospel undiluted in the interest of people's spiritual welfare.

When we proclaim the gospel, we need to beware lest we attach conditions to what is unconditional. "If you are sorry, then God will forgive you." "Jesus died for you and all you have to do to be saved is believe." "If you believe, then God will forgive you." Such statements attach conditions to what is unconditional. Jesus did not say to the paralytic, "Are your sins forgiven?" Nor did he say, "Your sins will be forgiven if you

repent and open your heart to me.” He simply said, “Your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2).

Confusing law and gospel undermines faith. It directs the person to look to his own works rather than to Christ alone for salvation. It robs people of the certainty of salvation, for it directs a person to his own efforts rather than to Christ. It also has dire consequences in the area of sanctification. The law cannot produce sanctification. Only the gospel can. A map may show me how to get to Chicago, but it will not give me the go-power to get there. Only if there is gas in the tank of my car will I get to where the map points me. The law shows me the will of God. The gospel puts the gas in my tank, enabling me to go in the direction God’s law points. If we wish to see sanctification grow in our own lives and the lives of God’s people, we will continue to work with the word, making a proper distinction between law and gospel.

The word is the tool God has given us to meet the spiritual needs of the world. As we work with the word, we have the confidence that our ministry will not be in vain. God’s word will accomplish his purpose. This is the confidence we have, then, as we work with the word in the ministry.

III. THE CONFIDENCE WE HAVE AS WE CARRY OUT THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD.

The prophet Isaiah received a call few of us would relish. The Lord told him, “Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (Isaiah 6:9-10). When Isaiah asked, “For how long, O Lord,” the Lord responded, “Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken” (Isaiah 6:11-12). Yet, later the same prophet was assured by the Lord, “As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11). Isaiah witnessed the rejection of God’s word. By faith he also saw the word bring multitudes into the church.

We also have this same assurance. No, not every one will believe. But God’s word will never be proclaimed in vain. The results are up to him. He has simply told us to plant the seed. He will produce the harvest. What a comfort for us as we work with the word. God will strengthen our faith as we study and work with his word. He will use us as his instruments to touch the hearts and lives of others with his lifegiving gospel of salvation.

When we lack energy and vitality in our ministry, we may go to God’s word. There in God’s grace in Christ we will find the strength to continue our work, the reason for our ministry, and the assurance of God’s blessings upon the proclamation of his word. When we feel we are becoming stale in our work, we will find in the word new vitality and new vistas for carrying out our ministry.

When we feel sorry for ourselves as we bemoan the problems we face in ministry, we find in the word new vitality for continuing the work we have been called to do. We

see from God's word what a privilege he has given us to serve him as bearers of his word in the specific place and among the specific people he has called us to serve. God's word will enable us to see people, not as problems or irritations, but as opportunities for service, as channels through whom we show our love for the Lord.

A study of this marvelous and unique gift which God has given to us will lead us to see ministry with a fresh perspective and a new vitality. Instead of feeling that we are doing God a favor by serving in the ministry, we will see through God's word what a privilege our Lord has given us. May the result of this symposium's study of God's word be that we return to our ministry or studies for the ministry with the attitude of the hymnwriter,

And then for work to do for Thee,
Which shall so sweet a service be
That angels well might envy me,
Christ crucified, I come (TLH 390:4).

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