

# HABITVS PRACTICVS

Luther Submits

Theology and Practice to Scripture



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## INTRODUCTION

I can't help but smirk. Our seminary dogmatic notes stressed that the study of theology is *habitvs practicvs*. Leave it to the classic Lutheran dogmaticians to use a Latin phrase to describe how down to earth and practical the study of the scriptural theology should be.

Perhaps Luther would smirk, too. Or maybe he would rattle on against how minutia-obsessed dogmaticians disconnect God's Word from the lives of God's people.

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that while Luther was a formidable and scholarly theologian, he was no theoretical, "ivory-tower" theologian. That is not to say that Luther twisted his practice to suit the most expedient and "practical application" of God's Word. To Luther the Scriptures were no wax nose. The Word governed his theology and his application of theology in his work as a professor of theology, as a Reformer, in his personal life, and in his various pastoral duties. Or, as Heiko Oberman puts it, "Luther may well have started ... listening first to Scripture and then applying it in the light of daily life. Faith in God and experience in life were so intimately linked for Luther that the beginning cannot be distinguished from the end (Oberman, page 212)."

For this reason I also hesitate to say that, for Luther, "*Doctrine determined practice.*" Luther did not see himself as a dogmatician. Perhaps this was so because he had had more than his fill of scholasticism in his youth. But I believe that Luther did not focus on "doctrine" *per se* because he had something better, namely, the living, breathing, active Word of God in the Scriptures and the Word of God incarnate. For Luther this living, untamable Word also determined more than just "practice." The Word, as the extension of God's power, governed all existence.

Before proceeding any further, however, please allow me the obligatory disclaimer. How Luther submitted his theology and practice to the rule of Scripture is an immense subject. The matter could easily fill a large book. Indeed, it already has been the subject of many volumes authored by men far more skilled than this presenter. It is also not an overstatement to say that the entire history and essence of the Reformation boils down to *sola Scriptura*. That is, how God used Luther to rediscover and then implement the supremacy of the Word over tradition, over papal and council decrees, and over human subjectivism.

Therefore, for the sake of time and due to the limitations of this presenter, this paper will only scratch the surface. We will omit some of the more familiar events from Luther's life and also many of the familiar writings of Luther. Hopefully, however, this undertaking will whet your appetite for further study. So, the structure of this paper will be to make a few observations about Luther's views on Scripture and its application to life, review a few specific pastoral examples from Luther's life, and then make some applications for the modern Lutheran pastor. Also, since Luther strove to let Scripture speak for itself, I will let Luther speak for himself through extended quotes. I will also let those more gifted than I comment on Luther's connection of Scripture to life, once again, through extended quotes.

## LUTHER'S VIEW ON SCRIPTURE - GOD'S WORD RULES!

In the twentieth chapter of his book, the prophet Jeremiah complains to the Lord.

O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived;  
you overpowered me and prevailed.  
I am ridiculed all day long;  
everyone mocks me.  
Whenever I speak, I cry out  
proclaiming violence and destruction.  
So the word of the LORD has brought me  
insult and reproach all day long.  
But if I say, "I will not mention him  
or speak any more in his name,"  
his word is in my heart like a fire,  
a fire shut up in my bones.  
I am weary of holding it in;  
indeed, I cannot.  
I hear many whispering,  
"Terror on every side!  
Report him! Let's report him!"  
All my friends  
are waiting for me to slip, saying,  
"Perhaps he will be deceived;  
then we will prevail over him  
and take our revenge on him."

But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior;  
so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.  
They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced;  
their dishonor will never be forgotten.  
O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous  
and probe the heart and mind,  
let me see your vengeance upon them,  
for to you I have committed my cause.

Martin Luther could have easily spoken these words. They demonstrate what God's Word did to Luther. They describe what God's Word meant to Luther. Luther understood that God's Word ruled over him, sometimes harshly, other times with comfort. Above all, the Word was supreme because it was God's Word and God was, is, and will be eternally supreme.

Heiko Oberman observes,

Luther, too, saw himself as an instrument, but of a totally different type [than Erasmus.] It was not intelligence or determination that was shaping the course of his career; God was driving him on and sweeping him along. He had no illusions about his abilities.

[Luther] recommended that the Holy Scriptures, not his works, should be read; and if anything else was to be consulted, then rather the *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon's concise work of Evangelical doctrine first published in 1521.

Luther's self-assessment might be taken for the last vestiges of monastic humility, but it was humility with a hard core: service to the Word - Luther had not sought it; the post of a professor - he had not desired it; the mission of an evangelist - he would have liked to avoid it.

Time and again Luther offered to cease his activities if only the Gospel became public property. But again and again he was overwhelmed, led where he did not wish to go, by a God who, irrespective of obedience or disobedience, steers the course of history (Oberman, page 210).

But perhaps we should just let Luther speak for himself. In his lectures on Genesis (*circa* 1537) Luther describes how he views God's supreme power over him and all creation.

For to hear the Word of God is not play or sport. When it strikes the heart, it is like a thunderbolt which overthrows even the most strongly fortified places by its force, as the account of Paul shows when he was dashed to the ground on the journey to Damascus (Acts 9:4). There he heard no high-sounding words; but he felt that his spirit was being crushed, as the Lord says in the Book of Jeremiah (23:29): "My words are not feeble, but a fire and a hammer which shatters rocks." Paul hated the Gospel with such an obstinate heart that he was like an immovable rock. Yet he is shattered by the hammer of the Word. For "God kills and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam. 2:6).

Accordingly, God does not speak with us as one human being speaks with another. "His words are like a two-edged sword by which hearts are pierced" (Heb. 4:12). [LW, vol 3, Gen 20:8]

Probably, the most well-known example of Luther stating how God's Word ruled him and compelled him came in April of 1521 at the Diet of Worms. In front of the assembled powers of both empire and *ecclesia*, Luther declared,

Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the **Holy Scriptures** or evident reason (for I believe in neither the Pope nor councils alone, since it has been established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I **am bound by the Scriptures** that I have adduced, and **my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God**; and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen. (WA, 7, 836-38.) [as quoted from the website, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/luther03.html>, emphasis mine.]

For as bold as this statement was, it really should not have surprised anyone at the time; at least anyone who had been seriously paying attention to Luther. Twenty months earlier, at the Leipzig debate, Luther sparred with Eck. In this debate it was God's power exercised in the Word that pushed Luther into those dangerous waters of wrestling with Germany's most respected theologian. And truly, the truth of God's Word got Luther into hot water. As Brecht observes, "The Leipzig debate's epochal significance lies in the conflict over the primacy of the

pope, which never before in the history of Christianity had occurred in this magnitude (Brecht, vol. 1, page 317)." Brecht also says, "[Luther] stubbornly maintained one thing: Eck had not furnished a single Bible passage in support of the divine establishment of Rome's primacy. Even against the church fathers, although among them he did have Augustine on his side, [Luther] would maintain that the Scriptures teach that Christ is the foundation of the church (Brecht, vol. 1, page 319)." So, the "early" Luther held firmly to the authority of Scripture over and above all the opinions of theologians, traditions, councils, and, - the most dangerous of all things to say - even over the Pope.

This is where Luther truly broke with tradition. Throughout the Middle Ages nobody ever really questioned the authority of God's Word, at least not the way it has been done in the modern era. Evidence of this is that Luther did not include in his catechisms or in his Smalcald Articles a section entitled, "The Inerrancy of the Scriptures." He didn't have to. Debates over inerrancy and inspiration were essentially non-existent.

However, even though the medieval church considered the Scriptures as God's true and authoritative Word, the churchmen of the Middle Ages viewed the Scriptures as a sort of *primus inter pares*. The *pares* being those decrees of the councils and, especially, of the Pope. So to the scholastic, papal theologians it would never have been *sola Scriptura* but, instead, *Scriptura dictaque ecclesiae* (The Scripture and the dictates of the Church). In effect, the papists were not doing as modern historical critics do, namely dragging God's Word down to the level of fallible human writings. The papists were doing the opposite, hoisting the fallible word of man up to the level of the infallible Word of God.

But, to use a term that had not yet been coined, Luther clearly considered that only Scripture was *norma normans*. Luther writes, "I do not reject them [ie, the decrees of councils]. But everyone, indeed, knows that at times they have erred, as men will; therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they give me evidence for their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred (LW. 32.11)." Luther also wrote, "When anything contrary to Scripture is decreed in a council, we ought to believe Scripture rather than the council. Scripture is our court of appeal and bulwark; with it we can resist even an angel from heaven - as St. Paul commands in Galatians 1(:8) - let alone a pope and a council (LW. 32. 81)."

By the time of his 1531 lectures on Galatians Luther had thoroughly sharpened his spear against his Roman enemies. By then he did not even see later medieval decrees even as *norma normata* but rather, to coin a term, they were *norma fallens et deformata* (a standard that deceives and is deformed). Luther writes,

We are presented here with an example that enables us to know for a certainty that it is an accursed lie that the pope is the arbiter of Scripture or that the church has authority over Scripture. This is what the canonists and commentators on the *Sentences* have wickedly declared, on the following basis: "The church has approved only four gospels, and therefore there are only four. For if it had approved more, there would have been more. Since the church has the right to accept and approve as many gospels as it wishes, it follows that the church is superior to the gospels." What a splendid argument! I approve Scripture. Therefore I am superior to Scripture. John the Baptist acknowledges and confesses Christ. He points to Him with his finger. Therefore he is superior to Christ.

The church approves Christian faith and doctrine. Therefore the church is superior to them.

To refute this wicked and blasphemous doctrine of theirs you have here a clear text and a thunderbolt. Here Paul subordinates himself, an angel from heaven, teachers on earth, and any other masters at all to Sacred Scripture. This queen must rule, and everyone must obey, and be subject to, her. The pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven—these should not be masters, judges, or arbiters but only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of Scripture. **Nor should any doctrine be taught or heard in the church except the pure Word of God. Otherwise, let the teachers and the hearers be accursed along with their doctrine.** [LW, vol. 26, Gal 1:8-9, emphasis mine.]

So, Luther viewed the Scriptures not as the word of man, but what they truly are, the Word of God (1 Th 2:13). Therefore, to go against the Word is to go against God. That's something that Luther had tried in the monastery and at which he had failed miserably. So the Word ruled Luther. He had no choice but to follow, obey, and submit to all of God's pure and powerful Word, for not to do so was neither, "safe nor right."

Luther's understanding of Scripture, however, was not just as simple as viewing the Bible as the "Rule Book of the Almighty God." To understand Luther's full view on the Scripture, and to understand the proper use and application of Scripture, you have to consider two more points - two points that go hand in hand.

Once Luther gave his attention to a serious study of Scripture he clearly saw that all the Scriptures testify about Him (John 5:29). Then, since Luther viewed the Scriptures as Christocentric, he quickly reformed the prevailing allegorical method of Scripture interpretation.

In 1535 Luther began his epic lectures on Genesis. At the end of his commentary on the Flood, Luther wrote, *Concerning Allegories*. The following extended quote demonstrates Luther's Christocentric approach to all Scripture interpretation. *(Please note that in the following quote when Luther mentions "faith," this is always shorthand for 'faith and its object, Christ the Savior.'* For Luther faith was inseparable from Christ.)

I was so enchanted by [allegories] in my youth that under the influence of the examples of Origen and Jerome, whom I admired as the greatest theologians, I thought that everything had to be turned into allegories. Augustine, too, makes frequent use of allegories.

But while I was following their examples, I finally realized that to my own great harm I had followed an empty shadow and had left unconsidered the heart and core of the Scriptures.

In our own age the unlearned mob of the Anabaptists, no less than the monks, are in the clutches of an excessive zeal for allegories.

There one is free to fabricate anything whatever. We recall that M $\ddot{u}$ nzer, that rebellious spirit, turned everything into allegories. But truly, he who either fabricates allegories without discrimination or follows such as are fabricated by others is not only deceived but also most seriously harmed, as these examples show.

Hence allegories either must be avoided entirely or must be attempted with the utmost discrimination and brought into harmony with the rule in use by the apostles.

Yet these remarks must not be understood to mean that we condemn all allegories indiscriminately, for we observe that both Christ and the apostles occasionally employed them. **But they are such as are conformable to the faith**, in accordance with the rule of Paul, who enjoins in Rom. 12:6 that prophecy or doctrine should be conformable to the faith.

When we condemn allegories, we are speaking of those that are fabricated by one's own intellect and ingenuity, **without the authority of Scripture**. The others, **which are made to agree with the analogy of the faith, not only embellish doctrine but also give comfort to consciences**.

Thus Peter turns this very story of the Flood into a beautiful allegory when he says in 1 Peter 3:21–22: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves us, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a dear conscience, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead," who is at the right hand of God, swallowing up death in order that we may be made heirs of eternal life, and "who has gone into heaven, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him." This is truly a theological allegory, that is, **one in agreement with the faith and full of comfort**.

Of the same nature is Christ's allegory in John 3:14 about the serpent that was raised up in the desert and those who looked up at it and were healed from its bite. Likewise Paul's (1 Cor. 10:4): "Our fathers all drank from the supernatural rock."

These allegories are such that they not only agree nicely with the subject matter but also **instruct hearts about faith and are profitable to the conscience**. (LW, vol. 2, Genesis 9, emphasis mine.)

We must take note. Luther did not despise and reject all allegory. He only rejected those allegories that had their basis in the fanciful thoughts of sinful man. On the hand, Luther approved of those allegories that conformed to the clear Scripture and taught salvation by faith in Christ alone. Ultimately, this was Luther's concern. God gave the Scriptures so that the Scriptures could give faith in Christ and, thereby, poor sinners might be reconciled to God and justified before God (John 20:31). Faith in Christ is the core for Luther, not just for theology, doctrine, and 'practice,' but for his whole life and existence. In this vein Timothy George summarizes, "In this way the formal principle (*sola scriptura*) of the Reformation is determined by the material principle (*sola fide*): Justification by faith alone based upon the grace and work of Christ alone is the key to understanding God's revelation in Scripture alone (George, as quoted from [www.quodlibet.net/luther.shtml](http://www.quodlibet.net/luther.shtml))."

Before we move onto Luther's application of Scripture to real life situations, it is necessary to return to what we would call Luther's views on inerrancy. Some modern critics have posited that Luther only accepted the Scripture's authority insofar as (*quatenus!*) they talked about Christ. Critics have charged that Luther did not regard some books of the Bible, for example, James, Jude, and Revelation, as having the same *gravitas* as the more clearly Christ-centered books. However, most of these arguments are anachronistic. These arguments take the modern views of higher textual criticism and try to 'retro-fit' them to Luther quotes.



Luther's criticism of any Bible book was relative. For example, Luther criticized James as being an "epistle of straw." However, Luther did not suggest dropping James from the canon. A quote from John Warwick Montgomery should quell any serious argument that Luther did not regard every word and every book of the Bible as God's pure and true Word.

The centrality of Scripture in Luther's experience is conceded even by those who claim that he did not hold to the inerrancy of the Bible. Their argument goes that Luther's strong affirmations of scriptural authority apply to its Christic content, which he experienced so deeply: as for the biblical "details," Luther was impatient with them and ought not to be regarded as a modern plenary inspirationist. ... Philip Watson, in his otherwise masterly study, *Let God Be God!* writes: "For Luther, all authority belongs ultimately to Christ, the Word of God, alone, and even the authority of the Scriptures is secondary and derivative, pertaining to them only inasmuch as they bear witness to Christ and are the vehicle of the Word." Neo-orthodox theologian J. K. S. Reid echoes this theme, concluding: "For Luther. Scripture is not the Word, but only witness to the Word, and it is from Him whom it conveys that it derives the authority it enjoys."

What can be said in critique of this interpretation of Luther's bibliology? Much, but one point is all that is needed: the view is simply not Luther's. ... Listen to some of Luther's representative - and often pungent - affirmations on the extent of inerrant biblical authority: "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself; it only appears so to senseless and obstinate hypocrites." "Everyone knows that at times [the fathers] have erred as men will; therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they prove their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred." "Mr. Wiseacre is a shameful, disgusting fellow. He plays the master if he can discover that [in our Bible translation] we have perchance missed a word. But who would be so presumptuous as to maintain that he has not erred in any word, as though he were Christ and the Holy Spirit?" [Montgomery, <http://www.mtuo.com/articles/bissar37.htm>]

## LUTHER APPLIES SCRIPTURE - GOD'S WORD RULES!

One of the hallmarks of Luther's work was putting the gospel into the hands, ears, minds, mouths, and lives of the people. So, although Luther regarded the Scriptures as God's pure and powerful Word and Decree, Luther did not want the Bible to be so sacred that it was withdrawn from common use. Oberman states,

Erasmian "skepticism,"...would, as Luther anticipated, lead believers astray in one of two ways. On the one hand the Scriptures would be elevated to "Holy Scriptures" and locked away with seven papal seals that could be broken only by the "Holy Church." With that the book on which the Church was founded would become a Church Book, shrouded in mystery, deriving its authority and power from the pope...

The other consequence, too, would result in a sealed book, but this time final judgment would be left not to the pope but to biblical scholars...who...so complicate the Scriptures that the "uninitiated" Christian can no longer find any solid ground in which to root his faith (Oberman, page 215).

So, you could say, that Luther never wanted to see another Bible like the first Bible he encountered - chained to the podium in the library of the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. Luther wanted the common Christian to have access to the Word of God, and not just so the common man could read and understand God's Word but also so that God's Word would rule, reform, and, most of all, comfort every Christian with the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ.

To accomplish that goal Luther labored at Bible translation. But since the common Christian was less likely to pick up a Bible and read it but more likely to hear God's Word in church, Luther also put worship into the language of the common German peasant. We get a glimpse of Luther's zeal for translating the Scriptures into everyday German when we read a letter he wrote to Spalatin at the end of 1523. Luther wanted Spalatin to assist him in translating some Psalms for worship. Luther writes,

#### Grace and peace

[Our] plan is to follow the example of the prophets and the ancient fathers of the church, and to compose psalms for the people [in the] vernacular, that is, spiritual songs, so that the Word of God may be among the people also in the form of music. Therefore we are searching everywhere for poets. Since you are endowed with a wealth [of knowledge] and elegance [in handling] the German language, and since you have polished [your German] through much use, I ask you to work with us on this project; try to adapt any one of the psalms for use as a hymn, as you may see [I have done] in this example. But I would like you to avoid any new words or the language used at court. In order to be understood by the people, only the simplest and the most common words should be used for singing; at the same time, however, they should be pure and apt; and further, the sense should be clear and as close as possible to the psalm. You need a free hand here: maintain the sense, but don't cling to the words; [rather] translate them with other appropriate words. I myself do not have so great a gift that I can do what I would like to see done here. So, I shall find out whether you are a Heman, or an Asaph, or a Jeduthun. I would like to ask the same of Hans [von] Dolzig, [whose German] is also rich and elegant. (LW, vol. 49, #140)

Although Luther is a bit demanding on poor Spalatin, this letter sums up the key points of this paper. Luther was a scholar. He knew the Scriptures well and he had written commentaries on the Psalms. However, Luther was no ivory tower theologian. He wanted to put the Word into the simple language of plain folk. But at the same time Luther insisted on faithfulness to the Word because the Word was the pure and powerful voice of God.

This is not to say the Luther brought everything down to the lowest common denominator, especially in worship. His high regard for the majesty and supremacy of God did not allow him to trifle with worship. Even though Luther was eager to purge papist errors from the worship life of the Church, Luther took a balanced approach in his worship reforms.

Luther was so cautious because the Scripture teaching on adiaphora ruled him. An example of this doctrine governing Luther's practice occurred in December of 1521. While Luther was at the Wartburg and Karlstadt and Zwingli were wreaking havoc in Wittenberg, Luther published *The Misuse of the Mass* in which he lovingly rebukes these men who were behaving more like revolutionaries than reformers. Of course, Luther could have easily felt the temptation to bolster his ego and encourage his "colleagues" at Wittenberg to push for reformation full speed ahead. After all, Luther had just written in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* that Rome's abuses in the mass lay in withholding the cup from the laity, transubstantiation, and the sacrifice of the mass. These evil practices were being thrown out in Wittenberg in the autumn of 1521. But the Scriptures would not allow Luther to approve of the rapid and forceful pace of the reforms. Therefore, Luther writes his letter so that the worship leaders in Wittenberg would rein in the scandalously rapid pace of these otherwise beneficial reforms - reforms that Luther himself would have gladly enjoyed. In the first few pages of *The Misuse of the Mass*, we see how Luther balances pastoral tact, an understanding of the Scripture's teaching on adiaphora, and a proper rebuke against those who took the changes too fast and too far. Luther writes,

To my dear brethren, the Augustinians at Wittenberg, I, Martin, wish the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have been informed both orally and in writing, my dear brethren, that you are the very first to have taken steps to do away with the abuse of the mass in your assembly. Although it has pleased me greatly, because I regard it as evidence that the word of Christ is at work in you and that you have not received it in vain, **nevertheless, out of Christian love, which leaves nothing undone, I am deeply concerned that not all of you have taken such a great and noteworthy step with equal steadfastness and good conscience...**

But what will happen when throughout the world you suffer all kinds of derision, insults, viciousness, and dishonor from everyone, even from the pious, clever, holy, and wise; and are regarded as blasphemers because you alone, and so few of you at that, have dared to change the whole spiritual and human order contrary to all human reason?...

**I wanted to write this letter to you for the comfort and strengthening of the weak, those who cannot bear the storm and violence of the opponent and of their own despairing consciences...** Our consciences will make us sinners before God in many ways and damn us eternally unless they are well guarded and protected at every point by the holy, mighty, and true Word of God—that is, built on the only rock [Matt. 7:24–25]. Whoever does that is sure of his cause and cannot fail, nor waver, nor be betrayed. Such a sure, impregnable fortress we seek and desire (LW, vol. 36, page 133-34, emphasis mine).

Sadly, this letter did not achieve Luther's desired result. Although this letter was published in Wittenberg in late November of 1521, the Christmas Day riot was evidence that Karlstadt and Zwingli did not heed Luther's tactful rebuke. Matters deteriorated in Wittenberg to the degree that Luther had to come out of hiding. He arrived back in Wittenberg in March, preached eight sermons in eight days, and quelled the disturbance. Again, Luther relied on the proclamation of the Word to do this work and achieve this goal of peace and brotherhood.

But, again, Luther did more than just preach the Word. Luther lived the Word. Living the Word had one particularly personal application for Luther. Luther got married.

Entering marriage was not high on Luther's personal to-do list. Yet, as a doctor of theology and parish pastor, he had to deal with the subject of marriage. In 1519 he published *A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage*. In 1520 in the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* he also dealt with the subject of marriage, namely how the pope has violated God's Word by forbidding clerical and monastic marriage. In 1521 Luther published *On Monastic Vows* in which he urged monks and nuns to abandon their useless vows of celibacy and get married. In 1522 Luther wrote *On the Estate of Marriage*. In this work Luther demonstrates how God's Word compels and governs marriage. Luther writes,

In order to proceed aright let us direct our attention to Genesis 1[:27], "So God created man ... male and female he created them." From this passage we may be assured that God divided mankind into two classes, namely, male and female, or a he and a she. This was so pleasing to him that he himself called it a good creation [Gen. 1:31]. Therefore, each one of us must have the kind of body God has created for us. I cannot make myself a woman, nor can you make yourself a man; we do not have that power. But we are exactly as he created us: I a man and you a woman. Moreover, he wills to have his excellent handiwork honored as his divine creation, and not despised. The man is not to despise or scoff at the woman or her body, nor the woman the man. But each should honor the other's image and body as a divine and good creation that is well-pleasing unto God himself.

In the second place, after God had made man and woman he blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply" [Gen. 1:28]. From this passage we may be assured that man and woman should and must come together in order to multiply. Now this [ordinance] is just as inflexible as the first, and no more to be despised and made fun of than the other, since God gives it his blessing and does something over and above the act of creation. Hence, as it is not within my power not to be a man, so it is not my prerogative to be without a woman. Again, as it is not in your power not to be a woman, so it is not your prerogative to be without a man. For it is not a matter of free choice or decision but a natural and necessary thing, that whatever is a man must have a woman and whatever is a woman must have a man.

For this word which God speaks, "Be fruitful and multiply," is not a command. It is more than a command, namely, a divine ordinance [*werck*] which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore. Rather, it is just as necessary as the fact that I am a man, and more necessary than sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, and emptying the bowels and bladder. It is a nature and disposition just as innate as the organs involved in it. Therefore, just as God does not command anyone to be a man or a woman but creates them the way they have to be, so he does not command them to multiply but creates them so that they have to multiply. And wherever men try to resist this, it remains irresistible nonetheless and goes its way through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for this is a matter of nature and not of choice. (LW, vol. 45, page 17.)

Of course, the only proper channel for the unstoppable sexual urges which God implants in humanity is marriage. Luther is in complete agreement with Paul when he said, **if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion** (1 Co 7:9).

In respect to the greater context of 1 Corinthians 7, Luther's Roman opponents insisted that celibacy, and most especially virginity, were much more God-pleasing than marriage. The

papists asserted that the Scriptures themselves elevated the unmarried state. In his as-yet unpublished dissertation Professor Charles Cortright addresses this point.

A Catholic response to this Reformation challenge to the spiritual estate came from Johannes Faber [1478-1541], the vicar of the bishop of Konstanz. Faber wrote a lengthy polemic against Luther defending monastic vows and the spiritual superiority of the celibate state, **but only on the strength of citations from "fathers, fathers, fathers, councils, councils, councils" not Scripture.** In fact, Faber claimed that the pope could promote celibacy without the Bible and that the passage "Be fruitful and multiply..." was nullified by Jerome's dictum, "Virginity fills heaven, marriage the earth." Luther had little desire to respond to Faber's "endless citations" to human authority and dismissed them with the quip, "My dog, too, looks at a lot of books every day." Faber's book goaded him only far enough to give the task of replying to it to the recently married Justus Jonas. Still, Faber had struck a nerve. Since the time of Jerome, Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 7 had been used to establish the pre-eminence of the celibate life. **A 1522 commentary by Melanchthon on the chapter criticized Jerome's views of celibacy, but did not employ the kind of exegetical muscle Luther felt was needed,** so he decided to take up the issues involved once again himself.

Luther's *Seventh Chapter of St. Paul to the Corinthians* addressed the freedom of the Christian to either marry or not marry, both states being "equal before [God], for both are his divine gift (*Also gillt auch fur yhm...gleich, denn beydes ist seyn goettliche gabe*)." But more importantly, Luther went on to declare that the church, by institutionalizing the unmarried state and enshrining it as "religious," and by calling the divine institution of marriage "secular," had things exactly backward. "It should be just the reverse (*Sondern es sollt umb gekeret seyn*)," growled Luther.

"Nothing should be called religious except that inner life of faith in the heart, where the Spirit rules. But since that also is termed religious which happens outwardly to the body through the spirit of faith, let us be very just and precise in our differentiation and understand that the state of marriage in all fairness should be termed religious and the religious orders secular. I speak here of the orders and the religious who have let people call and describe them thus. Those that act in true faith and are genuinely religious, they certainly belong to the right religious order of chastity."

To be sure, truly *chaste* celibacy is a great gift of God, and nobler than marriage because of its rarity. "Nevertheless, marriage is just as much a gift of God...as chastity is." Only those to whom God grants grace to live without marriage could promise to do so. Those who could not should get married. Thus Luther did not anoint marriage as the "more excellent way," but as the more *natural*, for within it alone the body's gift of sexuality is rightly channeled and used.

"Here St. Paul has piled all the reasons for marrying in one heap and set the goal for all the glory of chastity when he says: 'But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry.' This is as much as to say: Necessity orders that you marry. Much as chastity is praised, and no matter how noble a gift it is, nevertheless necessity prevails so that few can attain it, for they cannot control themselves. For although we are Christians and have the spirit of God in faith, still we do not cease to be

God's creatures, you a woman, and I a man. And the spirit permits the body its ways and natural functions, so that it eats, drinks, sleeps, and eliminates like any other human body." (Cortright, pages 156-159, emphasis mine).

Luther recognized from Scripture that God created humans for sex and procreation within marriage. Therefore, the essential human sex drive since it was part of God's original creation before the Fall, was good, beneficial and *natural*. The Scriptures said as much. Therefore, humans, who were created to procreate, dare not refuse God's will by forcing upon anyone the estate of celibacy.

To put into practice what the Scriptures said about marriage and the natural sex drive, Luther arranged the marriages of many former monks and nuns. Unfortunately, for these recently cloistered brides and grooms, almost none of them had salaries or skills. But Luther did not see these money problems as an impediment to marriage. He wrote near the end of the *Estate of Marriage* in 1522,

We have before us one big, strong objection to answer. Yes, they say, it would be a fine thing to be married, but how will I support myself? I have nothing; take a wife and live on that, etc. Undoubtedly, this is the greatest obstacle to marriage; it is this above all which prevents and breaks up marriage and is the chief excuse for fornication. What shall I say to this objection? It shows lack of faith and doubt of God's goodness and truth. It is therefore no wonder that where faith is lacking, nothing but fornication and all manner of misfortune follow. They are lacking in this, that they want to be sure first of their material resources, where they are to get their food, drink, and clothing [Matt. 6:31]. Yes, they want to pull their head out of the noose of Genesis 3[19], "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." They want to be lazy, greedy rascals who do not need to work. Therefore, they will get married only if they can get wives who are rich, beautiful, pious, kind—indeed, wait, we'll have a picture of them drawn for you.

Let such heathen go their way; we will not argue with them... He who would enter into wedlock as a Christian must not be ashamed of being poor and despised, and doing insignificant work. He should take satisfaction in this: first, that his status and occupation are pleasing to God; second, that God will most certainly provide for him if only he does his job to the best of his ability, and that, if he cannot be a squire or a prince, he is a manservant or a maidservant.

God has promised in Matthew 6[25, 33], "Do not be anxious about what you shall eat, drink, and put on; seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." Again Psalm 37[25] says, "I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his children begging bread." ... Look at Jacob, the holy patriarch, who in Syria had nothing and simply tended sheep; he received such possessions that he supported four wives with a large number of servants and children, and yet he had enough. Abraham, Isaac, and Lot also became rich, as did many other holy men in the Old Testament.

Indeed, God has shown sufficiently in the first chapter of Genesis how he provides for us. He first created and prepared all things in heaven and on earth, together with the beasts and all growing things, before he created man. Thereby he demonstrated how he has laid up for us at all times a sufficient store of food and clothing, even before we ask him for it. All we

need to do is to work and avoid idleness; then we shall certainly be fed and clothed. (LW, vol. 45, page 48)

All this talk and exposition of Scripture became very personal for Luther on June 13, 1525 when he wed Katherine von Bora. Luther stated that his reasons for marrying Katherine were to please his parents, to spite the devil, and to practice what he preached. (Quite the charmer, that Luther!)

This is not to say that Luther saw marriage as just simply the only divinely ordained outlet for sex and the creation of children. Luther also recognized that mutual companionship and sincere affection were necessary parts of following God's rule in marriage.

It is fairly well known that Luther and Katie did not love each other at the beginning of their marriage. But they did not base their marriage on modern notions of romance and being each other's "soul mate." Instead, their marriage worked because they had deep respect for each other and even more respect for God and his Word. Oberman puts it this way,

The reason for [Martin and Katie's] happiness [in marriage] lay as much in Catherine's character as in her husband's nature. But the decisive factor was that both of them regarded marriage as a profession and divine vocation without the romantic expectations of love that were later to increase so enormously the number of disappointments and marital breakups. It is true that the two had not been passionately in love when they started out, but what began as fondness and gratitude for a new form of companionship developed into a firm bond of love. The surviving letters [between Martin and Katie] are positive evidence of that. (Oberman, pages 280-81.)

In one of his table talks we come across this familiar quote, "I wouldn't give up my Katy for France or for Venice—first, because God gave her to me and gave me to her; second, because I have often observed that other women have more shortcomings than my Katy (although she, too, has some shortcomings, they are outweighed by many great virtues); and third, because she keeps faith in marriage, that is, fidelity and respect (LW, vol. 54, page 7)."

Marriage was not the only sphere where Luther sought to apply God's Word to a very practical and personal situation. Luther also brought God's Word of the comfort to the dying and the grieving. Charles Cortright states,

Luther's language in his letters written to comfort the sick and the dying offers a strong contrast to his pulpit bravado about bodily death. It is a contrast appropriate to pastoral ministry—an aspect of Luther's work that is often overlooked. The record of his personal contacts through reports in the *Tischreden* and his *Trostbriefe* written to persons high and low show Luther's empathy as a "fellow traveler" in the body with those experiencing sickness or dying. An example to the "high" is Luther's letter to Frederick the Wise who was gravely ill in September 1519. Luther wrote his prince a small devotional book, *The Fourteen Consolations for Those Who Labor and Are Heavy Laden* and in the accompanying letter said,

"When, therefore, I learned, most illustrious prince, that Your Lordship has been afflicted with a grave illness and that Christ has at the same time become ill in you, I counted it my duty to visit your Lordship with a little writing of mine. I cannot pretend that I do not hear the voice of Christ crying out to me from your Lordship's body and flesh saying, "Behold, I am sick." This is so because such evils as illness and the like are not borne by us who are Christians but by Christ himself, our Lord and Saviour, in whom we live, even as Christ plainly testifies..."

With regard to the "low," an example is the comfort Luther extended to a certain woman whose husband had died after a failed suicide attempt. (Concerning suicide, Luther did not hold the common opinion that suicide meant certain damnation, but entertained the view that, "like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber (wie einer yn eim walt von einem latrone ermordet wurd), the devil could have overpowered the mind.)

Writing to "widow Margaret" in this vein, he said:

"Honored, virtuous Lady: Your son N has told me of the grief and misfortune that have befallen you in the death of your dear husband.. It should comfort you to know that in the hard struggle in which your husband was engaged, Christ finally won the victory [and] that when he died he was in his right mind. That your husband inflicted injury on himself may be explained by the devil's powers over our members. He may have directed your husband's hand, even against his will. For if your husband had done what he did of his own free will, he would surely not have come to himself and turned to Christ with such a confession of faith. How often the devil breaks arms, legs, backs, and all members. He can be master of the body and its members against our will... God the Father comfort and strengthen you in Christ Jesus. Amen." (Cortright, pages 225-27.)

But the application of God's Word in the matter of death hit Luther the hardest on September 20, 1542. Luther's daughter Magdalena died. Charles Cortright describes how Luther put his faith in God's Word into practice during this most difficult time.

As [Magdalena's] life ebbed, Katie Luther wept loudly and Luther is reported to have consoled her, saying: "Think where she is going. She will come there right well. Let the flesh be flesh and the spirit be spirit. Children don't question; what one tells them, so they believe. Everything is simple with children; they die without distress, complaint, without the fear of death, with little physical pain, like they were falling asleep."

Going to Lena's bedside, Luther continued, "I have such love for her. But even so, if it is your will, dear God, that you take her, I will gladly know that she is with you."

Then he said to his daughter lying there, "My Lenchen, my little daughter, you would stay gladly here with me, with your father, and would you also gladly go to your Father?" The sick girl answered, "Yes, dear father, as God wants." Her father said, "You dear, little daughter! The spirit is strong, but the flesh weak. I have such love for her. If the flesh is so strong, how strong must the spirit be?" Katie stood away from the bed overcome with grief as Luther took his daughter in his arms: she died in them. "I am joyful in spirit, but



after my flesh I am so sad," Luther said as he wept. "The flesh wants none of this. Parting [with her] troubles one way beyond all measure. It is a strange thing to know that she is surely in peace; [she is] well there, even better—and still to be so sorrowful."

Magdalena was buried the same day she died, the university community escorting the grieving family to and from the funeral. As the coffin was lowered into the grave Luther cried out, "Est resurrectio carnis!" (Cortright, pages 227-28.)

Luther demonstrated this faith again three days later in a letter to Justus Jonas. However, in this letter, Luther also demonstrates how difficult it is for him to submit fully to God's will.

I believe the report has reached you that my dearest daughter Magdalen has been reborn in Christ's eternal kingdom. I and my wife should only joyfully give thanks for such a felicitous departure and blessed end by which Magdalen has escaped the power of the flesh, the world, the Turk, and the devil; yet the force of [our] natural love is so great that we are unable to do this without crying and grieving in [our] hearts, or even without experiencing death ourselves. For the features, the words, and the movement of the living and dying daughter who was so very obedient and respectful remain engraved deep in the heart; even the death of Christ (and what is the dying of all people in comparison with Christ's death?) is unable totally to take all this away as it should. You, therefore, please give thanks to God in our stead. For indeed God did a great work of grace to us when he glorified our flesh in this way. Magdalen had (as you know) a mild and lovely disposition and was loved by all. Praised be the Lord Jesus Christ who has called, elected, and made her glorious. God grant me, and all my [loved] ones, and all our friends such a death—or rather, such a life. This alone I ask of God, the Father of all comfort and mercies. In him, farewell to you and your whole family. Amen. (LW, vol 50, page 238.)

Again, even as we see Luther in the deepest pit of human sadness, Luther still demonstrates that God's Word rules his heart, his words, and his actions. Even in admitting his own weakness Luther still submits himself and his situation to God's Word.

Hopefully, by this time in the essay, you have come to a firmer conviction of what you have already known. Luther let Scripture determine practice. It did not matter whether that practice involved his role as husband and father or his role as teacher and pastor in the Church. Luther could not escape taking God at his Word and then putting that Word into faithful practice.

One more example - this combining inter-church relations and political machinations demonstrates that Luther did not compromise Scripture in a practical situation for the sake of allowing even well-intentioned Christians to accomplish a goal that was not in agreement with Scripture. For Luther, neither the end nor the means were justified apart from faithfulness to Scripture.

This example of Luther's faithfulness to the Word revolves around the hoped for formation of the Smalcald League which precipitated the Marburg Colloquy in 1529. For many years Philip of Hesse wanted a united political and religious front to prevent Charles' armies

from squashing the German states that had adopted the Reformation. To Philip's credit he realized that political union was not profitable without theological unity. So, on the one hand, Philip attempted to forge the Reformation princes into a military alliance against the *über-katholisch Karl der fünfte* (*'me disculpat! Carlos primo*). At the same time, Philip also attempted to bring about concord between Luther and the Swiss Reformer, Zwingli.

Unfortunately for Philip, Luther and Zwingli had been trading barbs for years over the issue of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. Finally, after the heat of doctrinal battle abated in early 1529, Philip managed to convince Luther, Zwingli, and other theologians, to meet in the Hessian city of Marburg on October 1 -3, 1529.

Although the two parties of theologians were very cordial to each other during the colloquy, they could not reach an agreement on the real presence. Luther would not compromise the Scriptures. Sasse reconstructs the debate in his book, *This Is My Body*. Here are some excerpts that show how Luther stuck to the Scriptures.

*Luther:* It annoys you [Oecolampadius] that I always stick to the words, "This is my body." I am not doing this without consideration. I confess that the body is in heaven, but I also confess that it is in the Sacrament. I desire to stick to these words that Christ is in heaven and that he is in the Sacrament. I do not ask what is against nature, but only what is against the faith...

*Oecolampadius:* Each body must necessarily be in one place only. It cannot be in several places simultaneously. Thus, since the body of Christ is in heaven, it cannot be in the Sacrament on earth.

*Luther:* **I do not want to hear mathematical distinctions in this connection.** For God, as the Aristotelian philosophers also admit, can cause one body to be either in one place only, or in several places at the same time, or outside of every place, for he is even able to bring it about that several bodies are simultaneously in one place...Therefore, I will not anxiously discuss the mode of presence (*modus praesentiae*), whether the body of Christ be in a place or outside a place, because this is quite irrelevant. I do not, therefore, demand such arguments of reason, but clear and valid words from Scripture... Testimonies from Scripture are required.

*Oecolampadius:* ...In the Supper [Christ] cannot be present bodily. He has become 'in all things...like unto his brethren' (Heb 2.17). As his is of one substance with the Father according to his divinity, so he is of one substance with us according to his humanity. What we are agreed on is that Christ is present in heaven [according to his divinity and humanity] and in the Supper [according to his divinity].

*Luther:* Until his coming you may distinguish between his humanity and his divinity; this is no concern of mine....Christ is in the Sacrament substantially, as he was born of the Virgin...

*Oecolampadius:* **You should not cling to the humanity and the flesh of Christ, but rather lift up your mind to his divinity.**

**Luther:** I do not know of any God except him who was made flesh, nor do I want to have another. And there is no other God who could save us, besides the God Incarnate. Therefore, we should not suffer his humanity to be underestimated or neglected...

**Oecolampadius:** When Christ gave us his body he, indeed, gave the body that he had. He had, however, a body that was capable of suffering and dying. If this be true, surely that body cannot be profitable for us, but rather a spiritual eating is required.

**Luther:** The eating of the body of Christ can be profitable because the promise of forgiveness of sins is connected with it. However, since every promise requires faith, and faith is a spiritual knowledge, therefore that bodily eating, too, if it is done in faith, should be regarded as something spiritual.

...

**Luther:** Let us not try to inquire **how** Christ's body is in the Lord's Supper...Christ can keep his body without space at a certain place. **He is in the Sacrament [but] not as in a place.**

**Zwingli & Oecolampadius:** God certainly can make it possible for one body to be in different places at the same time. We, however, demand proof that he does so in the Lord's Supper.

...

**Zwingli:** I have proved that Christ was in one place. It is up to you to prove that he is in no place or in many places.

**Luther:** At the beginning of our colloquy, you promised to prove that this would be impossible, and that our understanding is wrong. It is your duty to give that proof, and not to demand a proof from us. For we do not owe you a proof.

**Zwingli:** It would be a shame to hold, teach, and defend such an important article without being able or willing to give a proof from Scripture.

**Luther lifts the tablecloth and reads the passage which he had written with chalk on the table: 'Hoc est corpus meum.'** This is our Scripture passage. You have not yet taken from us as you promised to do. **'This is my body.'** I cannot pass over the text of my Lord Jesus Christ, but I must confess and believe that the body of Christ is there.

**Zwingli jumping to his feet:** Thus you, also, Doctor, assume that the body is in the Supper locally. For you say, The body of Christ must be **there. There! There! This is certainly an adverb of space!**

**Luther:** I have simply quoted the words of Christ, and I was not prepared for such a conclusion. If we want to deal cunningly with one another, then I testify that I have **nothing whatever to do with mathematical reasons, and that I exclude and reject completely from the words of the Lord's Supper the adverb of space.** The words

are: **"This** is my body', not: **'There** is my body'. Whether it is there locally or not locally, I do not want to know. For God has not yet revealed anything with reference to that, and no mortal man can prove it one way or another.

(Sasse, selected passages from pages 202-207, emphasis his.)

Notice how Luther would not use the same philosophical methodology that the Reformed used. Luther stuck to the plain, bare, simple words of Christ even if sophisticated logic could 'prove' that the words of institution did not make 'sense.' Luther dared never go beyond what is written ( 1 Co 4:6). Luther was not about to sacrifice the truth of God's Word on the altar of human wisdom or ecclesiastical compromise.

The failure to reach concord between the Reformed and Lutherans at Marburg also had political ramifications. Philip of Hesse was not going to be able to weld his political union together with the solder of theological unity. Here again, though, this was not a concern for Luther. Sasse comments,

Just as the Early Church did not attempt to save its existence either by trying to make a concordat with Nero, Domitian, and Decius, or by stirring up a revolution against these tyrants, or by making an alliance with the Persian Empire, but simply by confessing the truth of the Gospel and building up a truly confessing church whose members were prepared to die for the faith, so Luther and the early Lutheran church confined themselves to do what the Church, according to its nature as an ordinance of God, can and ought to be doing. Her sword is not a temporal one. (Matt 26:52), but 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (Eph. 6:17) (Sasse, page 164.)

So, again we see that, for Luther, the Word ruled all his actions, even if it meant 'practical' losses and setbacks. Luther was not concerned with outward, measurable human success. Luther simply remained faithful to the rule of the Word.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? - THE WORD RULES!

On occasion I like to tell my brothers in the ministry, "If I ever get assigned a conference paper, I am not going to write on the assigned topic. I'm going to write a paper on the theme, *"I'm not him and he's not here."* I made that comment because it seemed to me that a lot of conference papers and presentations attempted to sell a model of doing a particular area of ministry that really only worked for the presenter, or pastors in a very similar ministry setting. But one size does not fit all when it comes to the particular ways of doing pastoral ministry.

That is not to say that there should be no standards for ministry. It is not to say that we cannot learn from one another or that every parish should be like Israel at the end of the period of the Judges - *everyone does as he sees fit.*

However, it is my hope that this look at how the Scriptures ruled every facet of Luther's life and ministry, will lead us to realize that the Scriptures are God's own living and active power that governs each pastor in his particular ministry as the Lord sees fit. We don't make Scripture fit our pre-packaged 'ministry plans.' Rather, Scripture rules both us and our ministries.

Again, consider Luther. Luther did not formulate "Seven fool-proof ways to reform the Church," "Six sure-fire steps to stimulate spirituality," or "Twelve steps toward more involved laymen." Instead, Luther immersed himself in Scripture. Or, perhaps, a better way to put it would be as Jeremiah the prophet said,

O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived;  
you overpowered me and prevailed.  
But if I say, "I will not mention him  
or speak any more in his name,"  
his word is in my heart like a fire,  
a fire shut up in my bones.  
I am weary of holding it in;  
indeed, I cannot.

The Lutheran Reformation did not happen because Luther one day sat down and decided, "Hey, I am going to go set the Church straight." Rather, the Lutheran Reformation happened because God's Word ruled; yes, it ruled through the words and actions of Luther, but often through a Luther who was unwilling to go along for the ride. Oberman observes,

What we encounter in Luther is not the medieval battle cry, "God wishes it" - *deus vult*, but "God does it" - *deus facit*. Luther's exposure of curial abuses of power and the Scriptures was as impossible to suppress or retract as the discoveries of a Columbus before or a Copernicus after him. Remaining silent would have constituted, as he understood it, the spiritual murder of the faithful, who for centuries had been deluded into trusting in the authority of the Church.

The indulgence controversy was only the beginning. Again and again, after every new incident, every new turn of events that linked Luther's life with the history of the Reformation, he declared in his table talk and letters: "Here I was driven by God, here I was hurled from the beginning to the outcome." (Oberman, page 211)

So, in a nutshell (*in visu finis - Deo gratias!*), the Word rules. Don't try to prevent it from ruling by your contrived cleverness or cuteness. Don't try to force the Word to do something that God has not promised that it would do. Instead, study the Word. Study the Word. Study the Word. Then, proclaim the Word. Proclaim the Word. Proclaim the Word. Then, applying the Word to real life, practical situations will not be such the bewildering labyrinth it often seems to be.

Of course, even if we do study the Word, submit to the Word, and proclaim the Word, conundrums of casuistry will still certainly abound. Even Luther complained at the beginning of *The Estate of Marriage*,

How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage! I am reluctant to do it because I am afraid if I once get really involved in the subject it will make a lot of work for me and for others. The shameful confusion wrought by the accursed papal law has occasioned so much distress, and the lax authority of both the spiritual and the temporal swords has given rise to so many dreadful abuses and false situations, that I would much prefer neither to look into the matter nor to hear of it. But timidity is no help in an emergency; I must proceed. I must try to instruct poor bewildered consciences, and take up the matter boldly. (LW, vol 47, page 17.)

Yes, even though Scripture will inflict its often cruel rule over you and impose heavy burdens on your ministry, be bold and confident. Bring the Word to others as God has brought his Word to you. That Word seized you at your baptism. That Word elicited your undying faithfulness to God at your confirmation. That Word shackled you at your ordination and installation(s). That gracious Word of life also subdues and comforts you at the devotional, in your study, at the table, and beneath the cross.

So let the Word have its fierce and noble, firm and loving rule. And, by all means, don't do as I have done in this paper. Don't use Latin terms and extended quotes. My feeble attempts to impress you, my brothers, with a veneer of scholarship, has no place when it comes to applying doctrine and practice where it really matters-the pulpit, the classroom, the counseling office, the hospital room, and the funeral parlor.

No, instead, the way to connect doctrine to practice is simply this:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

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OK, ONE MORE FAMILIAR BUT YET PERTINENT QUOTE....

I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26–29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything. (LW, vol. 51, page 77.)

S.D.G.