

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2013-2014

What Difference Does it Make ... to the baptized? ... the unbaptized?

October 2013

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

TOPIC **What difference would it make, if the means of grace are not rightly taught and administered for both repentance and the forgiveness of sins?**

1. FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Bill and Sue come to you for pre-marital catechesis/counseling. You ask them if they are currently living together. Sheepishly, they look first at one another, then at you. “Well,” says Sue, “we figured we should see if we’re compatible before we make it official. And it really made sense for us financially.” “Do you recognize that living together and having sex before marriage are sinful?” you ask. Sue begins to tear up. Bill turns red. “Are you willing to confess your sins and be absolved? Are you willing to rectify the situation by moving out until the wedding?” Bill stands up. “What business is this of yours anyway, Pastor? This is between the two of us and God. Most people live together before marriage nowadays. And besides, even if it is sinful, God forgives us.” Sue looks at you, then at Bill, then at you again. Bill storms out of the room. Sue, in obvious distress, whispers, “I’m sorry, Pastor,” and follows Bill out of the building.

How have Bill and Sue misunderstood the nature of both repentance and forgiveness? ... the role of the pastor as a called servant?

What may be at the heart of Bill’s anger?

As their pastor, how might you apply God’s Word of Law and Gospel with the goal of bringing Bill and Sue to repentance and absolving them of their sins?

C. F. W. Walther’s theses on Law and Gospel, particularly theses VI and VIII is helpful here: “*You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you do not preach the Law in its full sternness and the Gospel in its full sweetness... You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you preach the Law to those who are already in terror on account of their sins or the Gospel to those who are living securely in their sins*” (*Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible*, Trans: Christian C. Tiews [St. Louis: Concordia, 2010] p. 3).

Bill and Sue have failed to understand that repentance includes the desire to turn from sin, and that forgiveness frees us from the power of sin. God doesn’t forgive us so that we can go on sinning, but in order to free us from sin and guilt. What difference would there be in the application of the Law and Gospel to Bill and to Sue?

2. SCRIPTURAL AND DOCTRINAL WITNESSES

A. **BIBLICAL WITNESS** to the nature of repentance and its essential relationship to the forgiveness of sins.

Repentance and the forgiveness of sins are the heart of the Church’s proclamation. Our Lord sets the standard for Christian preaching: “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*” (Mark 1:15; ESV [cf. Luke 24:47]). St. Peter follows

the Savior's example in his Pentecost sermon: "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*" (Acts 2:38; ESV). Repentance and forgiveness go together.

The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* defines repentance: "*we have established two parts in repentance, namely, contrition and faith. We will not object if someone wants to add a third part, namely, the fruits worthy of repentance [Matt. 3:8].*" (Kolb/Wengert, Ap. XII:28; p. 191).

Read **2 Samuel 12:1-15a & 15b-23**.

How are the two parts of repentance manifest in David's repentance?

The third (15b-23)?

What is the sequence of Nathan applying Law and Gospel to bring about David's contrition and consolation?

What bearing does the Absolution have on the temporal consequences of David's sin?

Read **Luke 22:31-34, 54-62**. How does our Lord use the Law to lead Peter to repentance?

How is His call to repent also a demonstration of His grace? How are the two parts of repentance manifest in Peter's repentance? For Peter's restoration, see **John 21:15-19**.

Read **Matt. 27:3-10** and contrast David and Peter's repentance with that of Judas. What is the difference?

How did the religious leaders fail in their responsibility to Judas? What was missing in Judas repentance?

B. DOCTRINAL WITNESS to the nature of repentance and its essential relationship to the forgiveness of sins.

Luther describes contrition as a result of God's Law in the Smalcald Articles III 3:1-2 "*The New Testament retains this office of the law... this is the thunderbolt of God, by means of which he destroys both the open sinner and the false saint and allows no one to be right but drives the whole lot of them to terror and despair. This is the hammer of which Jeremiah speaks: 'My word is a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces' [Jer. 23:29]. This is not 'active contrition,' a contrived remorse, but 'passive contrition,' true affliction of the heart, suffering, and the pain of death.*" (Kolb/Wengert, p. 312)

Why would God want to drive sinners to despair by the preaching of His Law?

What is the difference between "active contrition" and "passive contrition"?

The place of the Gospel and faith in repentance is described in SA III 3:4-5 "*To this office of the law, however, the New Testament immediately adds the consoling promise of grace through the gospel. This we should believe. As Christ says in Mark 1[:15]: 'Repent, and believe in the good news.'* This is the same as, '*Become and act otherwise, and believe my promise.*' Even before Jesus, John the Baptizer was called a preacher of repentance—but for the purpose of the forgiveness of sins. That is, John was to convict them all and turn them into sinners, so that they would know how they stood before God and would recognize themselves as lost people. In this way they were to be prepared for the Lord to receive grace, to await and accept from him forgiveness of sins." (Kolb/Wengert, p. 313)

What is the goal of preaching repentance?

In the first of his 95 Theses, Luther writes: "*When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance*" (LW V. 31, p. 25). How is daily repentance simply the living out of the baptismal life?

Confession and Absolution IS repentance and forgiveness in practice. The Small Catechism: *“Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven”* (CPH 1986).

In confession, the penitent expresses his/her contrition. The Law has done its work. The sinner has been killed. Here the Holy Spirit has done His alien work, bringing the sinner to nothing, that He might do His proper work, bringing the sinner to new life by the Gospel. The repentant sinner comes believing the Promise that *“when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command... this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself,”* because He does deal with us Himself in Absolution: *“If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven”* (John 20:23; ESV).

How might you lead Bill and Sue in the example from part 1 of this study to receive the blessings of Confession and Absolution?

3. CONSEQUENCES FOR THE HEARERS IF UNCLEAR/INCONSISTENT

What might be some potential consequences for the Baptized if we do not clearly articulate the relationship between repentance and forgiveness?

1. The baptized Christian may presume upon God’s grace, the very situation St. Paul addresses in Romans 6. “I like to sin, God likes to forgive, so we’re both happy.” “I know it’s a sin, but after all, God will forgive me.” How does this cheapen God’s grace?
2. The baptized Christian may despair, wondering if he/she has repented *enough*, thinking of repentance as something the penitent must create within the self (“contrived repentance”). Here there is a failure to recognize that true contrition is given by God. So also, the second part of repentance is missing, namely, faith in the Promise: Your sins are forgiven.
3. The baptized Christian may find him/herself trapped in a particular sin, unable to get free. Pastoral care applies preaching of repentance and forgiveness, Law and Gospel, to the baptized Christian, in such a way that the sinner is unbound. How might private Confession and Absolution be helpful for such a person?
4. Other consequences?

4. COMFORT AND CONSOLATION FOR THE HEARERS

- A. **BIBLICAL WITNESS** to the comfort and consolation afforded the repentant sinner, when Christ has His right place in both repentance and forgiveness in the daily life of the believer.

“[A] bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench” (Isaiah 42:3; ESV). Read the following passages from Holy Scripture:

Psalm 103:8-14; Psalm 130; Isaiah 1:18; Eph. 1:7.

How do these passages comfort the repentant sinner in Christ crucified?

In what way are the two parts of repentance, contrition and faith, included in these verses?

How do these verses hold forth God as the active agent of our forgiveness?

- B. **DOCTRINAL WITNESS** to the comfort and consolation afforded the repentant sinner, when Christ has His right place in both repentance and forgiveness in the daily life of the believer.

Small Catechism: “A confessor will know additional passages with which to comfort and to strengthen the faith of those who have great burdens of conscience or are sorrowful and distressed.” Consolation of the penitent is paramount in pastoral care.

How have you incorporated this into your practice of Confession and Absolution? What Scripture passages have been particularly helpful to you in consoling the penitent?

The pastor must not leave the penitent sinner with the Law. The Gospel alone offers comfort and consolation, generates faith in Christ, and endows the penitent with new life in Christ.

“But where the law exercises such an office alone, without the addition of the gospel, there is death and hell, and the human creature must despair... Moreover, the gospel does not give consolation and forgiveness in only one way—but rather through the Word, sacraments, and the like (as we shall hear), so that with God, there is truly rich redemption from the great prison of sin (as Ps. 130[:7-8] says).” SA III 3:7-8 (Kolb/Wengert, p. 313).

Finally, Christ alone is our consolation and confidence in God’s mercy. *“Thus, satisfaction can never be uncertain either. For it consists not in our uncertain, sinful works but rather in the suffering and blood of the innocent ‘Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ [John 1:29].”* SA III 3:38 (Kolb/Wengert, p. 318)

So that Christ may be our comfort and confidence, He has given us the Gospel. *“We now want to turn to the gospel, which gives guidance and help against sin in more than one way, because God is extravagantly rich in his grace: first, through the spoken word, in which the forgiveness of sins is preached to the whole world (which is the proper function of the gospel); second, through baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[:20]: ‘Where two or three are gathered...’”* SA III 4 (Kolb/Wengert, p. 319)

Why is it vital that the pastor lead the penitent to the means of grace for comfort and consolation?

5. POINTS TO PONDER

The penitent will find comfort, consolation, and new life in Christ alone, by whose blood we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, the penitent must not be directed to look within himself or to his own powers, but to Jesus only.

The content of all Christian preaching is repentance and faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:28). Repentance and forgiveness go together.

The goal of preaching repentance is always to prepare the heart for the preaching of the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus.

The Law leads the sinner to contrition. The Gospel alone gives the repentant sinner to real and eternal consolation.

The Law must be proclaimed in its full sternness to the unrepentant sinner. The Gospel must be proclaimed in its full sweetness to the sinner who has been crushed by the Law.

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