

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2013-2014

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

October 2013

LEADER'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?

At the heart of both Bill’s anger and Sue’s anxiety is the conviction of their conscience, which is accusing them (Rom. 2:15). They know they have sinned. Bill refuses to acknowledge this. Sue seems to want to do the right thing, but she’s caught between God’s Word/her conscience

and her love and loyalty to Bill. Sue seems to be on the verge of repentance, but she feels trapped. Bill's heart seems to be hardening. In applying Law and Gospel, the pastor may take a different approach with Sue than he will with Bill.

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?

David confesses his sin: "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:13; ESV). This shows his contrition. Likewise, he believes the Absolution pronounced by Nathan: "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (v. 13; ESV). Nathan clearly proclaims the Law to David: "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel," etc. (v. 7 ff.; ESV). So also, upon David's confession, Nathan pronounces Absolution. Nevertheless, there are consequences to David's sin. His son will die (v. 14). Indeed, *God's Son will die* for David's sin and the sins of all people. The third part of repentance is manifest in David's acceptance of the consequences of his sin and his faith that he will go to his son (v. 23).

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**.

Jesus warned Peter ahead of time that his pride would result in a great fall. "*The rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me*" (Luke 22:34; ESV). Still, He sustains Peter with a promise that he will be restored to strengthen his brothers (v. 32). When Peter does, in fact, deny his Lord, Jesus looks at him (v. 61). His look is that of both disappointment and compassion. It reminds Peter of Jesus' prediction (Law), but also shows Peter that throughout His sufferings, Jesus is mindful of Peter the sinner (Gospel). Peter's bitter weeping (v. 62) shows his contrition, as well as his love for the Savior, love born of faith. It is not unreasonable to believe that even as he recalls Jesus' prediction of his denial, so also he remembers the Lord's promise that He has prayed for Peter, and that Peter will turn and strengthen his brothers.

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?

Judas is profoundly sorry for his sin, but he lacks the second part of repentance, namely, faith that Jesus forgives him. The religious leaders fail in their responsibility to Judas by leaving him in his sin, leaving him to despair ("What is that to us? See to it yourself" [Matt. 27:4; ESV]). By contrast, David believes the Absolution pronounced by Nathan, even in spite of the death of his son. Peter's weeping is that of contrition, but he also believes Jesus' promise that He has prayed for Peter, and that Peter will be restored to strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:32). Jesus forgives Peter's denial, as He shows by His resurrection appearances to Peter and by restoring Peter on the seashore (John 21:15-19).

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?

The Law kills, it brings us to the end of ourselves so that we despair of ourselves and turn to Christ. God's goal is not to kill, but to make alive. But a resurrection can only come to the dead. To sinners who have not despaired of themselves will still vainly work for their own salvation. The Law kills the sinner, good and dead, so that God can do His proper work, His enlivening work, by the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus. A dead man has no choice. Salvation must come from outside of him, from the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

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

Luther calls active contrition "contrived remorse," i.e. a feeling of sorrow created by the penitent within him/herself for the purpose of placating God and somehow paying for sin. This is evident in the Roman Catholic penitential system, with its acts of penance. By contrast, passive contrition is given to the penitent by God. It is the affliction of the heart effected by God's Law.

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?

Like Jesus and John, the preacher preaches repentance to prepare the sinner for the preaching of the Gospel, “for the purpose of the forgiveness of sins.” When the sinner has no options left in himself, he must look to Jesus alone for forgiveness and life.

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?

Repentance is a daily return to Baptism, where the Old Adam in us is daily drowned and dies with all sins and evil desires that a new man may daily emerge and arise to live with Christ in righteousness and purity (see the *Small Catechism* on Baptism, the Fourth part).

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?

Here the brothers may share their pastoral wisdom and experience in similar situations. How were they resolved, or were they?

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?

Note: These are simply meant to be discussion starters. Let the conversation go where it will.

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?

God does all the action in Ps. 103:8-14. He is merciful and gracious, etc. He does not deal with us as our sins deserve. He separates our transgressions from us and remembers our frame that we are but dust. In every case, He is the active agent. Thus our forgiveness is all by grace, apart from any worthiness in us, including the worthiness of repentance. Psalm 130 confesses that within us there is only iniquity, but with God alone there is forgiveness, therefore the penitent sinner trusts in His Word. Is. 1:18 speaks of the cleansing of sin. The cleansing is an unconditional promise on the part of God, thus again, He is the actor. Eph. 1:7 brings it all together in Christ. God’s action for us is accomplished in Christ, in whom we have redemption by His blood, the forgiveness of sins. And this is according to the riches of His grace.

- 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?

Here let the brothers share passages that have been helpful to them in consoling penitents under their care.

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?

The penitent must not be left to his own resources for comfort and consolation. Nothing within himself can do the job. Pastoral care will always lead the penitent to the means of grace where Christ is present for the sinner to be forgiven sins. Through these means Christ also gives new life to the penitent, producing the fruits of faith.

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.

AUTHOR: Rev. Jonathan Krenz
Pastor, Epiphany Lutheran Church, Dorr, Michigan

GENERAL EDITOR: Rev. Mark W. Love
Pastor, St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Rockford, Michigan