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THE REFORMED VIEW OF THE GOSPEL

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THE REFORMED VIEW OF THE GOSPEL

... "And when they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan, a large altar in appearance..."

"And when the sons of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the sons of Israel gathered themselves at Shiloh, to go up against them in war."

"And they came... saying, 'Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, what is this unfaithful act which you have committed against the God of Israel, turning away from following the Lord this day, by building yourself an altar, to rebel against the Lord this day?'"

"Then the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered..." "The Mighty One, the Lord, the Mighty One, God, the Lord! He knows, and may Israel itself know. If it was in rebellion, or if in an unfaithful act against the Lord do not Thou save us this day!"

When the twelve tribes of Israel returned to take possession of their newly acquired land, the trans-Jordan tribes wanted to keep their close relationship with their brothers. However, the altar that they built resulted in a misconception that threatened to destroy that harmony. Fortunately, some clarification solved the misunderstanding and a war was averted. We cannot fault either side for being zealous for their faith, suspicious of "unorthodox" activities. In all of this we wonder whether there is a similar situation between the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches. Is it merely a matter of different backgrounds, different ways of doing the same thing? Would dialogue win a lasting peace between these two church groups or would it only re-establish that there are important differences? The purpose of this paper is to view the Gospel as seen by the Reformed, together with its applications, and then to ascertain whether this is consistent with Scripture or with the Lutheran Confessions. In order to find a starting place in this most complex maze of thoughts, we shall begin with the simple question: what is it all about?

The Reformation

We often hear the cry, "Back to the Bible!" We can find great agreement with that statement, provided it is applied to the liberals who would make Scripture only words about God. However, there is also much to fear in that statement as well. A return to the Scriptures is not properly the need for today, as it was not the need for the time of the reformation. What was needed then and is needed now is a return to the Gospel. Therein lies a big difference between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. While the Bible is the basis or cornerstone, the Gospel remains the power of life. In order to show their close relationship and the different views of Christian Churches, it is important to see what Scripture says about itself and the Gospel.

On the basis of Scripture, the cry, "Back to the Bible", does not ring true. Throughout the Old and New Testament there was a struggle, not so much against those who wanted to throw the Bible out, but rather a struggle with those who wanted to replace the Gospel with the Law. Isaiah wrote most beautifully about the Savior who would come:

"My Servant will act wisely, He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted... but He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him... and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

But notice what else Isaiah says in the same chapter: WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR MESSAGE AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?

Isaiah did not have the problem simply with those who rejected the Bible as God's Word. It was more a matter of turning it into Law and combining that with other rules and regulations. The Savior was ignored.

When Jesus sized up His enemies, He too did not find people rejecting the Scriptures, but rather those who were making it into Law. "You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me." (Jn. 5, 39) Here Jesus was speaking to the pharisees and to those Jews who insisted upon strict obedience to the laws. They searched the Scriptures. They knew it inside and out. Their problem, however, lay in the fact that they had turned the Bible into a book of rules by which they could earn eternal life. They did not look to Jesus.

Paul in Colossians warned against those false teachers who were again turning the Gospel into the Law, this by adding various regulations to faith. "Taste not, touch not, handle not... such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. (Col. 2, 21, 23)

The same was true of the Christians in Galatia where they had been listening with interest to those who were preaching "a Gospel which is no Gospel." Gal. 5:1-6 makes it clear that they were turning the Gospel into Law.

The Scriptures, while it places itself as the true Word of God as opposed to any false religion and its false "bible", aims primarily at opposing the "Back to the Bible" cry as opposed to a cry: "Back to the Gospel!"

This was the same question of the Reformation, for the problem did not lie in Rome's rejection of the Scriptures, but in her insistence on teaching justification acquired, not declared. She had turned the Bible into a rulebook, added some more, and ignored the Gospel. Yet here lies the difference between the Reformed and the Lutheran Churches. While the Lutheran conceives of the Reformation as a return to the Gospel, the Reformed see it as a return to the Bible. But before we ascertain what differences, if any, will occur because of this, it is important to let Scripture explain a few simple terms.

Scriptures; terminology:

Law: By the Law is the knowledge of sin. Rom. 3:20. It is true that the Law is the will of God, whatever He expects or commands or demands of us. In short, the Law indicates our worship of God:

"Therefore shall ye observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and do them; I am the Lord." (Lev. 19:37)

When speaking of the Law, we cannot limit ourselves to the Ten Commandments, which are only a summary of God's will. Adam and Eve knew the Law as God's will even though the Ten Commandments had not yet been handed to Moses. Without the matter of sin, the Law was a good and wonderful guide, written in man's heart, teaching him the ways he should walk (Rom. 2:14). However, man is sinful and thus Scripture places the main use of the Law as the mirror to reveal sin. Paul writes: "Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added because of transgression." (Gal. 3:19) Remember that Paul is here speaking of the moral law, and with that comes the lesson that man is unable to obey it. Because he cannot, the Law must condemn him. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4) and "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of the law to do them (Deut. 27:26).

Gospel:

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (Jn. 3:16)

Herein lies the Gospel message, namely, that our salvation does not depend upon what we do, or think, or say, but upon God, who in His mercy, sent us His Son to pay for our sins. Thus He offers us forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Properly speaking, then, the Scriptures speak of the Gospel as nothing else than this that "God has in Christ reconciled the world unto Himself". (2 Cor. 5:19) As opposed to the Law which tells us what we are to do, the Gospel speaks about what God does in Christ.

Grace:

"By grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:8-9)

Grace is described by Scripture as a gift. Thus when God forgives us, it is not because of something we have done to earn or to merit His love. It is a gift, freely given. Grace is the way God looks upon us, not the way He works in us. It is His declaring us justified upon the basis of Jesus' atonement.

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:4-7)

Faith:

"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Rom. 4:5)

This passage, like many others, describes faith as trust, or belief. Hebrews 11:1 reminds us that faith is the "evidence of things not seen". People may trust their money, themselves, their emotions, or even in "god". But their trust is misplaced since none of these things has any power to save. A saving faith must be a trust in Jesus' work. The power of a saving faith lies not in the strength of the faith, or in how openly and often that faith is shown. It is the object of faith that gives it strength. Thus the strong faith of an Abraham or the little faith of a malefactor on the cross were both saving because both trusted in the atoning power of the Savior.

We must also realize that Scripture never allows faith to become anything more than trust. It is never obedience. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." (Rom. 4:16) The point to remember here is that the power source does not rest in man, but always in God. God declares a man forgiven and that blessing is man's through faith. Keeping faith as trust and not obedience is important if grace is to be properly understood.

Repentance:

"Except ye repent, ye shall perish. (Luke 13:3)

The question is, what does repentance consist in? The word itself means a change of mind, and that is how Scripture uses it.

"Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings." (Jer. 25:5)

"Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations." (Ezek. 14:6)

These among other places describe repentance as a sorrow for sin, a hatred for sin, a putting away of sin. But that still has not fully defined repentance. Remember that repentance or perish is the cry. But a stoppage and sorrow for sin does not mean life. Neither does a doing of works pleasing to God. There remains but faith. 2 Tim. 2:25 describes repentance as faith:

"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

However, one other thought should be included. Scripture does not equate repentance with the fruits of repentance. When John the Baptist said, "Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance", he was demanding that the Pharisees and Sadducees prove they had repented. The next verse shows that they were not. The fruits of repentance are properly nothing else than the fruits of faith.

Means of Grace: 1 Cor. 2:14 reminds us that natural man is unable by himself to repent. He is incapable of realizing his need for a Savior. 1 Cor. 12:3 tells us that the only way a man can have faith is if the Holy Ghost gives it to him. But how? Rom. 1:16 speaks of the Gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation. Peter writes in his first epistle:

"Being born again... by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever... the Word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached." (1 Pet. 1:23,25)

Here Scripture indicates that it is the Gospel which gives life, equating the work of the Holy Ghost with the work of the Gospel. The same is true of John 6:63:

"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

When Scripture says that the Holy Spirit gives faith, it also restricts that work to the preaching of the Gospel. "How shall they believe in whom they have not heard? (Rom. 10:14) This does not mean that the Holy Spirit could not work faith without the Gospel. It just means that He doesn't choose to do so. There is no place in Scripture where faith existed without the Gospel.

Baptism is also described as a means whereby the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel to produce faith and forgiveness. Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins." Acts 22:16: "Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on His name." Without using Titus 3 or John 3, the Scriptures speak clearly enough about baptism as a means through which the Holy Spirit comes. Interestingly enough, Luke 7:30 says that the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.

Along with baptism we must also include the Lord's Supper. The Bible teaches the real presence as can be seen by reading the words of institution ("this is My body...") and also by reading 1 Cor. 11:27 where eating unworthily becomes a sin against the body and blood of the Lord present there. It also provides us with forgiveness, a means through which the Holy Spirit works. Jesus calls the sacrament the "New Testament in My blood."

Church:

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:26) The Scriptures teach that the children of God are those who believed in Christ as their Savior. Where there is faith, there is the church or gathering of believers. Faith is trust, not obedience. The children of God are united by their trust in Jesus, the same thing that has brought forgiveness and justification. In this church are all true believers "for by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles... and have been all made to drink into one spirit." (1 Cor. 12:13) In this same passage we also find the truth that the Christian Church is found wherever the Gospel is preached through Word and Sacraments. In this case, the means is baptism.

Faith is invisible, seen only by God. That is why the Bible says that only "God knows them that are His." We cannot, as humans, try to play God by attempting to make a physical church body into that invisible church. To do so requires either the ability to read men's hearts or a basis for membership other than faith. You cannot separate salvation from membership in the Christian Church, for where there is faith, both salvation and membership exist. The marks of the church are, then, the Gospel administered in Word and Sacraments, as these are the Scriptural means whereby faith is given and strengthened.

Christians' response to the Gospel: Through the Gospel the old is washed away, the sinner is renewed and a new heart is created. Ps. 51:10-12; Eph. 2:1-7,10. With this new attitude toward God, given by God (Phil. 2:13), the Christian begins to do good works, for where there is life, there will also be fruit. Jn. 15:5 vine and the branches; Lk. 6:45 good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good. Again and again Scripture emphasizes good works as fruits of faith, not an essential part of faith itself. Thus, when James writes, "Faith without works is dead," he is not saying that faith is deficient without works nor that faith cannot be faith, a saving faith, without works. It is simply saying that a saving faith will show itself by the fruits it produces. A Christian will confess his faith in action. We don't know what that action will be or how many of them each individual Christian will do since Scripture says that we are not the same. In Matt. 13, the parable

of the sower shows that each Christian will produce different amounts of good works. The Christian's life of sanctification will always be imperfect, as is indicated by the fluctuations of Peter's faith, to say nothing of Paul's words in Rom. 7. Thus while the Christian will present himself as a living sacrifice, he also knows that he remains a sinner, continually sinning, and thus needs to return to the Gospel and its forgiveness daily. The Law may act as a guide for a Christian's life of sanctification, but he must ever build upon the Gospel of Grace. 1 John 1:8 reminds us:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

One more thought should be added. While it is true that the Bible says that good works are proof of faith and election, we are not to make it our main source of proof. After all, the works of the Christian can be easily counterfeited. A lot of religiously dead people in the Bible were those who appeared to be the most religious. Secondly, making our life of sanctification a main proof for our having the Holy Spirit can be very dangerous, since there is only a fine line between that and boasting in good works. That is why Paul writes in two places: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." (1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17). Or again, when the 70 disciples returned to Jesus discussing their sanctification, their service in His name, Jesus reminded them: "However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20)

Thus the Scriptures speak concerning various basic teachings. While this may seem strange to have such an expose' of doctrine, it is important that we let the various Christian Churches have their say.

Christian Churches Reviewed

The Roman Catholic Church

To begin with, we must remember that the Roman Catholic Church does recognize the Bible as God's Word. We are not including the liberals who have their own problem. However, to the Scripture this church has added tradition, which it defines as doctrines handed down without being put into print. Among such traditions, however, are the immaculate conception of Mary, purgatory, and the infallibility of the pope. Such things, however, exhibit a disrespect for Scripture, since all three are neither taught in Scripture, nor do they agree with it.

Concerning the meaning of grace, this church has changed the declared righteousness from God into an achieved righteousness by man. In the R. C. production, The Question Box, Father Conway writes: "When we receive justification, by baptism into the death of Christ, we receive the power of meriting. . . He(Christ) merited for us the power of meriting."(p. 293)¹ Thus the work of Christ is rejected as the "once for all" sacrifice of sin. It merely gives us power to begin our own quest for salvation. Thus the Gospel is turned into Law and work-righteousness is the result. It is not surprising, then, that the church denounces the Biblical teaching of justification when it says: "If any man saith, that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity which is poured in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them. . . let him be anathema." (Council of Trent, Session VI, canon XI, XIII).²

Because she has added charity to faith, the Roman Catholic Church has overshadowed Christ with piety and obedience. Two results occur. The first is that the sacraments are changed in their purpose and secondly, the church takes on a different concept. The mass, or the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar, is viewed as the "perpetual sacrifice of the new law", in which Christ offers Himself in an unbloody manner, as He once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the cross, thus making the mass a sacrifice offered to satisfy the justice of God for the sins committed against Him. In His book, Holy Mass, Winfrid Herbst, a R. C. priest, writes: "Now is the time to appease the mighty Lawgiver and to offer Him Jesus, the greatest Reparation for our manifold transgressions."(p. 145)³ The Sacrament by which God gives and seals to us

forgiveness has become a sacrifice in which we offer Jesus to the Father to pay off our debt. Grace has disappeared. In a similar vein there is the matter of "ex opere operato", that is, that God infuses grace (ability to obey) into a person who is without faith. Thus the idea results that a person may act like a Christian, not having faith in Christ, and yet be considered a Christian. When grace becomes love and justification becomes sanctification, faith is finally by-passed. Thus, when the topic of the church arises, the Roman Catholic Church sees itself as the Holy Christian Church outside of which there can be no salvation. This is taught because salvation has been made a result of good works, which are in turn performed by the Catholic excited by the "grace" given him in the means of grace. In short, salvation depends upon the Christian following the instructions and rules of the Roman Catholic Church. Those who follow closely to her rules are members, while those who do not, aren't.

When the Catholic honestly examines his faith, he is left with the question: What must I yet do to inherit eternal life? He knows the rules, but also knows that he cannot keep them perfectly. It is the rulebook, not the Savior, which get the attention.

The Lutheran Church

Here again we must remember that the Lutheran Church is not in total agreement on Scripture. This goes back to the time of the Reformation when even Luther had to warn people against the tendencies of Melanchthon to concede Scripture for sake of peace. Anyone who has done any reading into the history of the Augsburg Confession and the altered Augsburg Confession of Melanchthon sees the problem. The same problem of making concessions to heresy for the sake of unity occurred years later when a division over Scripture led to the writing of the Formula of Concord, a most wonderfully defined summary of Scripture. Again in 1817, Kaiser Frederick Wilhelm III "united" the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Germany, which resulted in reduced state beauracracy in the church department, but also resulted in a watered-down confessionalism. Today, the ALC and the LCA have their roots in that merger, as does the WELS. Missionaries were sent to the U.S. with the inbred idea of acceptable compromise for unity and numbers. However, only the WELS extracted itself from the compromise that occurred. The LCMS began as a reaction to the Kaiser's decision, taking 612 Saxons in three boats from Germany, landing at New Orleans, with a final move up into Missouri. At the present time, the major Lutheran Churches do not agree on Scripture, nor on the confessions as correct explanations of Scripture. I present here the views of the Lutheran Confessions themselves, the official statements of her understanding of Scripture. God grant that we may ever study and hold fast to them.

Concerning Scripture, she says: "The Word of God shall establish articles of a faith, and no one else, not even an angel." (Smold, Art. II, p. 15) Of course that is easy to say-but-we must hear how the other teachings of Scripture are defined.

The Augsburg Confession states: "Men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who by His death has made satisfaction for our sins. This God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 4:4 (Art. IV) Having established its position of salvation through grace, we now turn to the Law and Gospel.

"We hold that the Law was given by God, first, to restrain sin by threats and the dread of punishment, and by the promise and offer of grace and benefit. But all this miscarried on account of the wickedness which sin has wrought in man. . . . But the chief office or force of the Law is that it reveal original sin with all its fruits, and show man how very low his nature has fallen, and has become utterly corrupted" (Smold. Art. Part III, Art. II, p. 1, 4).

"But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, is to believe, namely, that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and has obtained and acquired for him,

without any merit of his, forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life" (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. V, p. 4).

"We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church with great diligence as an especially brilliant light, by which, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God is rightly divided... "everything that reproves sin in, and belongs to, the preaching of the Law... But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who had not observed the Law... is to believe, namely that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and has obtained and acquired for him, without an merit of his, forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life" (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. V, p. 1, 3-4).

"Likewise the term repentance also is not employed in the Holy Scriptures in one and the same sense. For in some passages of Holy Scripture it is employed and taken for the entire conversion of man, as Luke 13:5: Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish... But in this passage, Mark 1:15, as also elsewhere, where repentance and faith in Christ, or repentance and remission of sins, are mentioned as distinct; to repent means nothing else than truly to acknowledge sins, to be heartily sorry for them, and to desist from them. This knowledge comes from the Law, but is not sufficient for saving conversion to God, if faith in Christ be not added... For the Gospel proclaims the forgiveness of sins, not to coarse and secure hearts, but to the bruised or penitent... Therefore the two doctrines belong together, and should also be urged by the side of each other, but in a definite order and with a proper distinction; and Antinomians or assailants of the Law are justly condemned, who abolish the preaching of the Law from the Church, and wish sins to be reproved, and repentance and sorrow to be taught, not from the Law, but from the Gospel" (Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Art. V. pp. 7-9, 15).

Concerning conversion and original sin "One side has held and taught that, although man cannot from his own powers fulfill God's commands, or truly trust in God, ... nevertheless he still has so much of natural powers left before regeneration as to be able to prepare himself to a certain extent for grace, and to assent, although feebly." "On the other hand, both the ancient and modern enthusiasts have taught that God converts men, and leads them to the saving knowledge of Christ through His Spirit, without any created means and instrument, that is, without the external preaching and hearing of God's Word."... "Against both these parties the pure teachers of the Augsburg Confession have taught and contended that by the fall of our first parents man was so corrupted that in divine things pertaining to our conversion and the salvation of our souls he is by nature blind, that, when the Word of God is preached, he neither does nor can understand it, but regards it as foolishness... and remains an enemy of God, until he is converted, becomes a believer, is regenerated and renewed, by the power of the Holy Ghost through the Word when preached and heard, out of pure grace, without any co-operation of his own" (Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Art. II, pp. 3-5).

"Therefore God, out of His immense goodness and mercy, has His divine Law and His wonderful plan concerning our redemption, namely, the holy, alone-saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, publicly preached; and by this collects an eternal Church for Himself from the human race, and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of sins, and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And by this means, and in no other way, namely, through His holy Word, when men hear it preached or read it, and the holy Sacraments when they are used according to His Word, God desires to call men to eternal salvation, draw them to Himself, and convert, regenerate, and sanctify them" (Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Art. II, pp. 50).

"The Church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is properly the congregation of saints... We grant that in this life hypocrites and wicked men have been mingled with the Church, and that they are members of the Church according to the outward fellowship... But the Church is not only the fellowship of outward objects and rites, but it is originally a fellowship of faith and of the Holy Ghost in hearts. which fellowship nevertheless has outward

marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ" (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. VII and VIII, pp. 18, 3, 5).

By maintaining the distinction between the Law and the Gospel, the Lutheran Church keeps faith from becoming confused with love, charity, or works. By maintaining its understanding of the Law, the proper understanding of sin is maintained, thus permitting no cooperation on man's part. Because the Lutheran Church teaches correctly that even the Christian still sins (Rom. 7), the message of the Gospel of forgiveness always receives pre-eminence. Thus Christ for us on the cross is glorified, not any reaction of our will or hands. By maintaining a proper understanding of Christian doctrine, the Lutheran Church keeps clear the power of the Word as opposed to any foreign source of power toward conversion. It preserves the power to forgive within the sacraments and continually holds before her people the message of Christ crucified for them.

The Reformed Church

This church grouping is much more difficult to understand simply because it is composed of a most multitudinous series of denominations. The Reformed themselves prefer to list themselves into three categories: the Calvinist, the Arminian, and the Barthian, each supposing itself to be quite different from the others. In reality, all three are most similar, but differing only in their application of reason over Scripture, the differences only being the degrees to which each group allows reason to rule.

Perhaps it is easiest to describe the Barthian or modern or liberal school of thought first. Barth taught along with others that the Bible is the fallible and erring words of men about God and that it could not be called the Word of God. This elevated man's reason over Scripture and allowed him to decide what is or is not right. Barth used his intellectualisms to deny the Triune God calling Him (or "it" in Barth's case) "the wholly other". As a result, the atoning sacrifice of Christ was replaced by a social gospel, ("do good to all people and be nice"), man's corrupt nature was denied, the power of God's Word and sacraments to forgive was ignored, the need for correct teaching of God's Word was of little value, revelation was elevated over learning, and a religious humanism resulted. Man was in control of his life. God, whoever or whatever He or it is, was acceptable provided He or it did not interfere with man's reasoning abilities. Barth is one of the fathers of the liberalism that is destroying denomination after denomination. What I should like to point out is that the errors of Barth are only the final application of typical reformed thinking. Please reread this last paragraph on Barth before proceeding with the rest of the paper.

Backtracking we come to the Arminians, primarily identified with the Methodists. Jacob Arminius led the way in a revolt of sorts against Calvinism during the 17th century. Basically Arminians teach that God from all eternity predestined to eternal life those whom He foresaw would believe (intuitu fidei). Secondly, they teach that Christ died for all men, not simply for the elect. Thirdly, they believe that man cooperates in his conversion by free will. Then they teach that man may resist divine grace, that is, that he can reject God's call to conversion. Finally, man may fall from divine grace, that is, he can lose his faith. Notice that some of these teachings are indeed Scriptural. Christ has died for all men, man may resist God's call to faith and man may fall from faith. Notice, however, that the other two premises stem from reason and indicate the same errors as Barth taught. When God is not free to elect to eternity those whom He wills, but must choose those whom He saw would come to faith, then the election is no more of grace, but a necessity. Faith becomes not a gift from God that holds to Christ's merit, it now becomes a condition or work which we must perform. When man is said to cooperate in conversion according to his free will, then original sin is denied, Christ is demoted to an aid to salvation rather than the Savior alone, man's reason which dreamed up this teaching takes honor next to Christ in claiming for itself the power to choose or accept Christ into one's life. Notice how in Arminianism man's mind has gained control despite the very Christian and Scriptural trappings that surround it.

Methodism is its biggest development, and its slogan is typically Reformed: "Deeds not creeds." Arminianism, like all the Reformed, rejects the power of salvation in the Word

itself. The Holy Spirit will work with the Word, alongside of the Word, but not through the Word. Consequently, doctrine has little value to the Methodist, except perhaps for the very basics, since learning Christian doctrine becomes a mere mental exercise rather than a means by which the Holy Spirit feeds our faith. Once the Holy Spirit is separated from the Word, faith becomes a hollow shell, turning itself into obedience and emotions, rather than trust. It becomes something that tries to anchor itself in something within a person rather than anchoring itself on the promises of God in the Word and Sacraments. Thus conversion becomes an experience, a taking hold of by the Holy Spirit in the sense that He can be felt and that the person makes a complete change of life and is "perfected" and that he receives special gifts from the Holy Spirit to prove his conversion. Holiness groups or Pentecostals are often part of the Arminian strain, although not necessarily due to a general lack of regard for Christian doctrine among the Reformed.

With reason equal to Scripture, Christ outshadowed by the Holy Spirit, emphasis on sanctification (what we do) as opposed to justification (what Jesus has done), with faith becoming experience, it is not surprising that the concept of the Christian Church takes on a different form.

The marks of the Church no longer remain the Word and Sacraments, but rather conversion experiences and Christian actions. It is no longer the believer who can claim membership, but it is the experiencer. With its emphasis on holy living as opposed to repentance and forgiveness, its message from pulpit, from press, from mission outreach is more a matter of moralism, of changing people's actions and lives, rather than calling to repentance. Earthly welfare takes pre-eminence over "spiritual" welfare and social gospel is the result, as it was with Barth.

The Calvinist side of the Reformed Church will oppose the Arminian and Barthian schools of thought, but not always for the Scriptural reason, since she too cannot free herself from the elevation of reason and revelation over Scripture and its teachings. The Calvinist can be found in the Baptist, Presbyterian, Christian Reformed, and evangelical churches. She too has a series of doctrinal statements to distinguish herself. They are known as the T-U-L-I-P. T is for total depravity, by which the Calvinist means that man is totally sinful and cannot do good, cannot understand the good, cannot desire the good. U means unconditional election, by which the Calvinist believes that God elected some to be saved and elected the others to go to hell. God's sovereign plan decides all that is to happen in the entire universe, and nothing can happen by chance. Thus, it is taught that if a man goes to hell, it is because God said he would go there, the man having no chance for salvation. Thirdly, L is for limited atonement, which means that God never intended that Jesus die for the sins of the world, but only for the elect. To say that Christ died to save all men but that some won't be saved is to the Calvinist blasphemy, since it implies that Christ's blood was wasted, that He could not accomplish everything He was supposed to if some don't come to faith. The I stands for irresistible grace, which teaches that when God has chosen someone to be saved, He sends the Holy Spirit to change him from being hateful to being loving. No one can resist Him. His grace is irresistible in that He does what He wants to do. Those not saved are not because God doesn't send the Holy Spirit to work in them. Finally, the P is for perseverance of the saints, which says that once saved, always saved. Once you believe, you cannot lose your faith; you can never go to hell.

Here again we find much to agree with, much to reject. It should be noted that the Calvinist is very careful to use Scripture, as this is the part of the Reformed Church that loves and holds close the Bible as God's Word. That is a very great plus for them, and we rejoice over it and pray that their love for the Word of God is never lost. It does teach original sin and total depravity as Scripture does. However, reason over Scripture shows itself in this area by the refusal to baptize infants and by the teaching of "age of accountability", that time around 12 yr. old when the Calvinists suppose the children are mature enough to be held responsible for their own sins, when they are at such an age whereby their mind can accept Christ into their life. Such teachings, however, have no basis in Scripture and in reality deny total depravity. If the Calvinist really believed in total corruption, he could not accept the statements: "I made my decision for Christ", "I accepted Christ into my

life", "God, I pray that you would enter into my life and give me faith." (not all Calvinists hold to this) Such should be the statements of the Arminian and his free will, but the Calvinist cannot reject this either. They cannot reject such statements because despite their insistence upon total depravity, they have reasoned for themselves a will that is able to choose Christ before the Holy Spirit brings faith. They may wish to call it "common grace" as Cornelius Van Til does in his book, Common Grace and the Gospel or prevenient grace. In reality it parallels the Roman Catholic idea of meritum de congruo or works that are done before faith and conversion to attract God's attention. In the Calvinist's case, it is a kind of indefinite grace that sparks a little faith to accept Christ and then the real gift of grace comes later. Despite all the ballyhoo to defend himself, the Calvinist shows his true colors in this area by his words and actions. His love for reason prevents him from holding to the very idea of a corrupt heart that he thinks he is espousing.

The idea of unconditional election has no basis in Scripture, but remains an invention of the Calvinist's mind. God does elect those to eternal life whom He will, but that does not mean that the opposite and logical action is also true, namely, that God elects the others to go to hell. To the Calvinist who insists upon making God's actions "logical" to the human mind, it is a necessity to teach a double election. However, Jesus Himself says quite clearly that though God will try to convert all men, those who reject it and are damned are responsible. It is their choice, not God's. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and yet would not!" (Matt. 23:37). The Lutheran correctly teaches that if some are saved, then it is God who gets all the credit. If some are lost, it is man who is responsible. It is not logical, but it is Scriptural. The Reformed cannot accept this, but must go beyond Scripture to satisfy their reason.

The limited atonement is also a clear example of man's mind reading something into Scripture that is simply not there. "It is truly folly to try to read a limited election into such passages as "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world" (John 1:29), and "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son..." (John 3:16). If the Calvinist wishes to find a passage to support his idea, he will eventually be backed up to Rom. 5:19: "... so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." However, even this does not teach a limited atonement. The word many is, "hoi polloi", a euphemism, meaning the masses-or-all people. But again, notice the reverence for reason over Scripture.

Irresistible grace lays bare another problem with the Calvinist. In his attempt to praise God, He confuses God's almighty power with God's saving power. They are to be kept separate. God created the world with His Word, after all He said and it was so. But that was Law-commands of God. God's saving Word is the Gospel which does not command, but invites. It is not "Thou shalt do this!", but "I have done this for you." It has a power of its own. Like many other teachings, this idea of irresistible grace did not start with the Bible and then be condensed into confessional form. The process was reversed. Because the power of the Gospel was changed into God's almighty power, His Law, if you will, the promises of the Word and Sacraments were lost, thus removing the assured comfort the Gospel gives. In order to find proof of faith, the Calvinist was left with the Law and theorized that if God is almighty and sovereign, then nothing can go wrong. Therefore if I believe I have faith and it is given by God, then obviously I must be a Christian because God can't make mistakes. But again, the Matt. 23 passage shows that Jesus Himself had no intention of teaching an irresistible grace. This does not, as the Reformed respond, imply a cooperation of man's mind in conversion. It simply implies that a different power is used: the still, soft voice of the Gospel as opposed to the whirlwind of the Law.

The idea of perseverance of faith, or the impossibility of falling from faith, is again a reasonable assumption due to the reverse process of finding a "truth" and then searching for proof. Passages such as 1 Cor. 10:12 "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he also fall"; and Hebrews 3:12 "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God," clearly speak of the possibility of falling from faith. In 2 Timothy 4:10 Paul says that Demas has fallen from faith, "Hath left me, having loved this present world." Jesus Himself in the parable of the sower in

Luke 8:13 speaks of those "which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." Clearly, we have found in the Calvinist a willingness to ignore Scripture's own teachings, but using her words to teach other things. Which leads us to the next point: behind the errors of her teachings, what is the problem of the Reformed Church?

The problem of reason

Any good counselor knows that listening to a couple speak of their marriage "problems" is nothing less or more than hearing the symptoms of the real problem. The various false teachings of the different Reformed strains indicate a common error: the supremacy of reason over Scripture.

M. Eugene Osterhaven, in his book, The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition described the difference between Zwingli and Luther. "Luther was a theologian steeped in the traditions of the church, conservative, biblical, and uncompromising. Zwingli was first a humanist influenced by the new learning of the Renaissance, then a theologian, and a radical in thought. Zwingli believed some saved without gospel, limited effect of original sin and held reason high. Luther was the exact opposite, writing that either he or Zwingli must be the minister of the devil and Luther was quite certain that it was not himself." ⁶(p. 22)

Here lies part of the key to understanding the difference between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. Both are highly steeped in the use of Scripture, but the founders, Luther and Zwingli were quite different. By the Reformed's sown admission, Zwingli was first a thinker, then a theologian. Luther was first a theologian, then a thinker. Zwingli was an admirer of Erasmus, a theologian who wanted to free the human reason from the fetters of Scriptural limitations. Thus Zwingli and the Reformed are often found to be searching in areas where God has not spoken in His Word. Speculation into areas of God's will and reason for doing things is amply evident by reading the tenets of these bodies listed above. A millennialism that speculates into the "supposed" end of time is another example. Luther and those following merely remain with what God has revealed in His Word, making no demands that God's Word be more logical, refusing to speculate, insisting upon correct understanding in all areas. The Reformed wish to make God logical, that is, conforming to the abilities of their own reasoning and adopting in essence Isaac Newton's idea: "What cannot be understood is no object of faith.: Consequently, election must be double because it is logical that if God elects some to be saved, He then must have elected others to damnation. The Real Presence in Holy Communion is impossible because it isn't logical to eat and to drink Christ's true body and blood. Baptizing infants is not logical because you cannot see any indication of faith. The Lutheran replies, "It is irrelevant what you or I think is logical or not; what does Scripture say?"

Most Reformed will downplay the effect Zwingli has had upon their churches and prefer to support Calvin. R. C. Reed writes: "Among the mighty ones who aided in this revival, Calvin was in certain respects the mightiest. He was the profound thinker and the wisest scholar." (p. 10 The Gospel as Taught by John Calvin)⁵ Fairbairn wrote: "With the insight of genius he perceived that the battle could be won not by chance recruits, but only by a disciplined army; and, in order that the army might be created, he invented the discipline." Fairbairn argues that Calvin was greater as a legislator than as a theologian, although he so construed the latter as to make the former "its logical and indeed inevitable outcome." p. 22 (Osterhaven, Spirit of Ref. Tradition)⁶

Once again Osterhaven has pinpointed the problem in the Reformed camp. Its founder, John Calvin, though a great theologian, was first a legislator, then a theologian. His purpose was not to return the Church to the correct understanding of Christian doctrine through which the Holy Spirit would work. His idea was to restore the proper actions or disciplines of the Church, thus producing the proper obedient conditions under which the Lord would give His blessings to them. Thus R. C. Reed again praises Calvin for turning Geneva into an obedient community, implying that because of it, the Lord could now bless their efforts with growth etc. Luther would have none of it and thus is not admired as much by the Reformed—all due to the fact that he refused to "reform" the Lutheran Church on the

basis of what Calvin believed was commanded by Scripture. Luther wanted a community of believers built on faith; Calvin sought a community of obeyers based upon the theocracy of Old Testament Israel.

Both Zwingli and Calvin have left their mark upon the Reformed, not so much by their writings as by their spirit. It is the reverence of reason, the trust in reason to be able to understand and make logical the unrevealed will of God. It is exemplified by the well-known "God has called me to do this", which the Lutheran hates to hear. It is the presumption on the part of the Reformed that they are able to know exactly what God wants to say without having it written down in Scripture. The Lutheran can only say, "I believe this is God's will" or "It may be God's will, but only time will tell." The Reformed will make their decision and adamantly stick to it because "it is God's will", while the Lutheran moves carefully because he knows that as a sinful human being, he is quite adept at making wrong decisions at times, always praying that God would turn our evil into good. Yet this very significant difference and its application has led the Reformed Church to change the Gospel into Law.

Gospel into Law

Here we must recall that we perceive the Law as all that God commands of us or forbids us to do. The Gospel, on the other hand, is that which God in Christ has done and is doing for us. The Reformed would not agree. While the Bible says that the Law convicts us of sin and brings us to repentance, it is the Gospel that announces to us forgiveness. Consequently, using Law only will either lead us to despair by continually reminding us that we cannot make restitution for our sins, or it will lead us to arrogance and moralism which says that if we stop doing the bad and just do the good, then we will be all right. If only the Gospel is taught without the Law preceding, then it appears to men that God will accept them the way they are and therefore they should not feel guilty over any mistakes. Thus the Lutheran Church continually stresses the first use of the Law to convict men of sin and then and only then applies the Gospel to announce the forgiveness of sins. The Reformed disagree.

Karl Barth writes:

"According to this concept, which is generally spoken of as the only evangelical conception, revelation must be regarded as a cone with its point turned toward man and containing the intelligence that his sins are forgiven. Thus the point of revelation is identical with the Gospel, the glad tidings. The Law has a place before and after the Gospel, before it in order to terrify the unbelieving sinner, after it, in order to guide the believing sinner and hence it is only for the sake of understanding the Gospel that the Law has any place at all in revelation. Accordingly the real and primary attitude of man toward revelation, according to the Lutheran view, is an attitude of need. One might go so far as to say that this is an over-emphasis, made with that kind of impetuous willfulness which is at once the secret and danger of Lutheran teaching in more than one place-an overemphasis which cannot be substantiated either by the facts or by the Biblical testimony to the facts. The precariousness of this over-emphasis has long since been demonstrated, and, much as one may respect and admire Luther, we would do better not to go along with him in the theological ingenuity which he manifests here." (Dogmatics, Vol. 1 p. 326)⁷

Barth typifies the reaction of Reformed theologians to our distinguishing Law and Gospel. It is his contention that the Lutheran Church is not giving the Law its due. He contends that the Reformed have given the proper balance to Law and Gospel, justification and sanctification, faith and obedience. However, that does not quite ring true.

In his Reformed Dogmatics, Hoeksema writes: "And the rain of the gospel coming upon that heart serves to manifest the corruption of sin that is in that heart. It is a savour of death unto death." (p. 559)⁸ In speaking of the reprobate, those elected supposedly to damnation, Hoeksema says that the Gospel condemns of sin and condemns to death. The Bible very clearly says, "By the Law is the knowledge of sin."

Calvin writes: "For although faith admits the veracity of God in all things, whether he command or prohibit, whether he promise or threaten, though it obediently receives his injunctions, carefully observes his prohibitions and attends to his threatenings-yet really it begins with the promise, on that it stands, and in that it ends." (Institutes, vol. 3, 29)⁹ Notice how Calvin describes the Gospel that faith is to believe. The Gospel is God's commands, prohibitions, threatenings, promises. This is not the Gospel which the Bible knows. Gal. 3:10 tells us that those living under the Law are cursed, not those living under the Gospel. Mark 1:15 says, "Repent ye and believe the Gospel." Here Scripture clearly rejects any attempt to make the Gospel into rules, prohibitions and commands. That is Law which threatens. It is the Gospel which forgives.

Gal. 3:11-12 states: "The just shall live by faith. And the Law is not of faith." If we are to see which Church truly has the proper understanding of the Gospel, we need only hear what they have to say concerning faith. The Lutheran Church says that faith is simply trust as Ps. 78:22 says: "They believed not in God and trusted not in his salvation." The Lutherans resist any attempt to make faith into obedience simply because the Gospel is God's promise of forgiveness in Christ. God says, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." the Reformed cannot say the same.

The Westminster Confession of 1647 defines faith as:

- 1) the acceptance as true of whatsoever is revealed in the Word, and 2) a conduct which conforms with each particular passage thereof, yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promise of God."¹⁰

Notice that this confession has changed the meaning of faith from simple trust into trust and obedience. Faith is the trust in Christ, while love is the response of faith, showing itself in various actions. Because the Reformed Church fails to distinguish between the two, the Law and the Gospel are confused. Faith is anchored in the Gospel, and the Gospel motivates the believer to act in love. The Law, as a guide, shows the Christian how he may express his love. To the Reformed, however, the Gospel takes on the flavor of the Law as a guide. Instead of comforting the sinners by pointing them to the full atonement of all sin by Jesus, their brand of Gospel commands and demands the observance of various conditions. It is not by accident, then, that Calvin made much of the phrase, "obedience of faith", located in Romans 16:26. Paul uses that phrase to mean obedience which is faith, while Calvin turned it around teaching a faith which is obedience.

Billy Graham and others often make a point of speaking about the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel. Hebrews 11:4 indicates that Abel's offering of a lamb was acceptable to God because Abel believed and willingly offered it to God. Cain's offering of produce grown by him was rejected because he had no faith. The difference being faith versus the lack of it. Not so with many Reformed speakers. To them the difference is not faith, but the obedience to a (future) law about sacrificing sheep. Abel's was accepted because he offered a sheep in accordance with the rules. Cain didn't and his was therefore rejected. To them, obedience, not faith, is the most important. Obedience becomes faith.

Thus, when Billy Graham tries to explain to his readers How to be Born Again, he goes about setting the conditions under which the Holy Spirit ought to enter the reader's life. He talks about sin, tells his people to read the Bible, and then will themselves to God. That should do it. The Campus Crusade for Christ does the same thing in its little leaflet, Four Spiritual Laws. Therein they set down the rules or conditions under which faith should come, and after faith will come justification. The only problem is that the Bible says the order should be reversed. I believe because God has justified me and given me faith and forgiveness. Faith is not a good work.

When it comes to repentance, the Reformed use the third use of the Law to instruct people in the conditions under which forgiveness ought to take place. In his book, The Deeper Faith, Gordon Girod speaks concerning the Christian who deliberately sins. On the one hand, he correctly says that maybe this person is only pretending to have faith, going

through all the actions of a Christian, but finally showing his true colors by his open sinfulness. On the other hand, it could be a sin of a true Christian. Here it is interesting to note what he says about the person's repentance.

"One day he will come before God in agony of repentance. Yes, in agony of repentance, for if he is a child of God, he will remember that Esau sought the place of repentance with tears and could not find it. In an agony of tears he will seek the place of penitence, and if he be a child of God, he will receive grace to find it.

And now you may ask: 'How can I be certain that I am a child of God and that He will ever let me go?' Have you ever wept for your sins? Have you ever felt deeply and agonizingly that you have failed your God? You see, it is only that man, that woman, who in the agony of their guilt before God—not once, but a thousand times—have sought forgiveness, who can know with certainty that God will not allow them to be lifted from the hollow of His hand." (p. 90)¹¹

Notice once more the way the Gospel is turned into a condition man is to fulfill before God will forgive him. In the first paragraph forgiveness is given to the just which says first become obedient that God may, and only may, forgive you. In the second paragraph it is the emotions within man that should bring about forgiveness and assurance. "If" you have done such and such, "if" you are truly or really repentant as opposed to just repentant, you should be forgiven. Instead of simply preaching the Gospel, God forgives sinners, the Reformed are made to suggest works or conditions a believer might try and then maybe God will do this. It is only when a believer thinks or feels that he has met those conditions that he can try to convince himself that now God has acted. Notice how God's Word of promise is ignored as is Jesus' cry: "It is finished!" The same approach is made to the Christian's assurance of eternity.

When the Lutheran wonders whether God truly loves him and has truly opened heaven's door for him, he looks back at his baptism and sees the Holy Ghost bringing him forgiveness and faith, God's mercy and protection. Consequently, the Lutheran will stay close to the Word that teaches Christ the Savior and will attend frequently the Lord's Supper wherein God's promise is given to him. The reformed responds,

"The assurance of salvation (in Reformed Protestantism) is not content, as in Lutheranism, with an immediate, naive, emotional reliance on the Word, but strives rather for a total development; hence the appeal to the absolute grace which stands behind the Word, and, linked with this, a reaching forward to manifest this grace in a life of action." (The Gospel and Other Churches, p. 176-177)¹²

Two things have taken place. The power of the Gospel has been replaced by the almighty command of a "sovereign" God (Law). Secondly, trust in the promise of the Gospel has been replaced by obedience to the Law, love. When the Reformed are asked concerning their certainty of salvation, they respond by looking at God's command that some will be elect. But that cannot offer any comfort because it doesn't tell them whether they are numbered among the elect. Upon asking that, they are led to base their election upon their "life of action". If they conform to the laws God has told His people to obey—if they are proper husbands, proper workers, truly repentant, really believers, then they are among the elect. Such a reasoning, however, can have two effects. Either it will drive that person to despair since he cannot claim perfection even as a Christian, or he will stand proudly upon his record of various Christian activities claiming: "All these things have I done from my childhood." Jesus reminds us: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

For example, have you ever listened to the 700 Club or to a broadcast of Reformed 'testimonies'? How is their Christianity shown? Is there a mention of Christ's forgiving them and their trust in that promise? Or is it rather a list of actions which the "Christ in them" has performed? "I did this because God led me... I once was doing that, but now I am doing it right... I, I, I!" A number of months ago, TV Guild asked the question:

"Are the values implicit in most successful electronic church programs actually the values of the secular society it pretends to reject? Strip away the 'praise God's' and the 'Lord blesses' from the 700 Club, the PTL Club or the Old-Time Gospel Hour and you discover the real values; material success, power, winning, security, wealth. In front of the slick desks, we see resplendent celebrities with gorgeous hair and \$500 suits who tell us how their records were slipping off the charts- until they accepted Christ. And now-Praise the Lord-they have a couple of gold records. A Christian advertising expert points out this is idolatry-to absorb the secular society's vision of success and self-centeredness and to justify it with a coating of Christianity."¹³

We may not agree with all the article says, however, but the underlying theme rings true. Proving one's faith on the basis of success and achievements, of excitement and turn-arounds is extremely close to, if not the very same thing as; the speech made by the pharisee in the temple. "Lord...I do this, I have done that!" Yet nothing else can be expected, since the Gospel is turned into Law and comfort becomes conditions.

I believe it was Sophocles who wrote: "An immature person is always trying to prove he is mature. A mature person simply acts that way." Teenagers have a difficult time because they so often try to act grown up, doing all the outward things like dressing up and wearing high heels and make-up. They have an image of what a "grown up" teenager is to be and desperately try to imitate it lest they be considered strange or outcasts by the "in" group. They take up grown-up problems and hot-bloodedly charge into ecology one week; then nuclear power the next. Their energy surges but often ends up getting little accomplished. They criticize their parents for not being as enthusiastic about one particular subject and are too busy running around to stop and think of what they are doing.

Unfortunately, I believe the Reformed fit this description all too clearly. They surge with energy trying to prove their election by their activities and criticize anyone who doesn't seem as excited as they. They flit from prayer chains to community involvement, from evangelism to making a particular presidential candidate an expression or denial of faith. Sadly, they are so busy trying to prove themselves saved that they cannot take time to simply sit down and listen to Jesus tell them they are forgiven.

The Lutheran does not expend such energy on Christian activity, and more's the pity. However, he also gets a bit perturbed when he is criticized for not acting like a Christian. It is not that the Lutheran is a do-nothing. It is simply that the Reformed have developed what, in their mind, is the picture of what a Christian must be doing. If the Lutheran doesn't appear to be doing that, he is dead wood. Then again, the Lutheran simply trusts the Gospel message and therefore knows he is saved. He doesn't need to make a lot of noise to prove it to anyone. He acts the best he can. He serves his Lord in his home and his job. He wants to know how he can improve his love to God, but he also refuses to brag about it. After all, Jesus said: "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

In this connection I believe the parable of the prodigal son describes the difference. When asked how he knows God loves him, the Lutheran replies: "Because when I was afar off, He came running to meet me and made me His son." The Arminian will reply: "Because I made my decision to return, while the Calvinist, like the second son, replies: "Because I have served Him faithfully." Or again, the Lutheran is like Mary who sits and hears Jesus speak, but needs to also get up and serve. The Reformed are the Marthas who are so concerned about serving that they forget that first one must sit and listen. It is not a matter of being a Mary as opposed to being a Martha. It is rather that we become both, but in their proper place and priority.

Reformation or restoration?

Because of the different understandings of the Gospel, it should not be surprising that there is a different understanding of what the Reformation was and what it should be today. To the Lutherans the Reformation was a return to the Gospel, because the false teachings of

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the Roman Catholic Church had enveloped the message of salvation. The approach, then, was to correct the doctrines of the Church so that the power of the Gospel to convert could once more act freely without the interference and hindrance of the bad. Once it became clear that the Roman Church would not be reformed from within, the Lutheran Church moved aside of it, building up as a foundation the proper understanding and use of God's Word and Sacraments. Her confessions declared the Bible truths as synthesized during struggles to free herself from paralyzing heresies. One cannot ignore the sad era of "dead orthodoxy" in which sermons became polemic attacks on false teachers, but adding no explanation as to why it was so vital for members to correctly believe a particular doctrine and how it applied to their life. Still, the confessions have been handed down and offer us a rich heritage that has preserved the saving Gospel power. The Reformation to the Lutheran, then, is to recapture the understanding of the Reformers so that no false teaching ever steals from him and his family the blessed assurance that comes from the Gospel.

The Reformed will not agree. To them the Lutheran reformation is incomplete. They have not yet "renovated" their church. They have gotten justification down pat, but then the Lutheran stopped. They failed "to get back to the Bible." Restoration, to the Reformed, means a return to the proper kind of church body that God has laid down in His Word.

To them an evangelical church is "One which is performed according to the bare letter of the Scriptures in the fullest sense of the word. Such a church can be called evangelical because it has restored the Gospel in its purity."

(Sasse, Here We Stand)¹⁴

That surely sounds good until we consider what is meant by "Gospel". By that is meant a reorganization of the church on the basis of definite divine commands. The Reformed Church is under the impression that there are ultimate rules for worship, given in the Bible, which need to be reapplied if a church is to be blessed. A most crass example of this is Watchman Nee and his book, The Normal Christian Church Life. Permit me to quote from him.

(God)"has thought it necessary to instruct through Acts, Corinthians and Timothy as to how to do His work and how to organize His church. God has left nothing to human imagination or human will. It is not our place, therefore, to suggest how we think divine work should be done, but rather to ask in everything, 'what is the will of the Lord?'"(p. 10) (cf. adiphora i. e. hymns, liturgies etc.)¹⁵

"In Scripture we find no trace of man-made organizations sending out men to preach the Gospel. We only find representatives of the ministry of the church, under the guidance of the Spirit and on the ground of the body, bending out to those whom the Spirit has already separated for the work."(p. 32)(cf. Jim Jones direct-call, dreams, visions etc.)¹⁶

"If we impose any conditions of membership upon a believer of the locality, we are immediately in an unscriptural position, because his being a member of a local church is conditioned only by his being a believer in the locality."(p. 59)(doctrinal agreement and good standing are unnecessary, no sinful nature)¹⁷

"If we wish to maintain a scriptural position, we must see to it that the churches we found in various places only represent localities, not doctrines. If our church is not separate from other children of God on the ground of locality alone, but stand for the propagation of some particular doctrine, then we are decidedly a sect, however true to the Word of God our teaching may be."(p. 67)(claimed faith is good, but actual faith is wrong)¹⁸

"Had Christianity required that places be set apart for the specific purpose of worshipping the Lord, the early apostles with their Jewish background and natural tendencies would have been ready enough to build them... it is Judaism, not Christianity, which teaches that there must be sanctified places of divine worship."(p. 115)(a chapel is unchristian, cf. stained-glass windows, padded pews, plush carpet etc.)¹⁹

Notice how the writer has turned the New Testament into a book of rules in his attempt to describe the "normal" church. Serving the Savior is overshadowed by rules, rites and regulations that emphasize the servicing, the how to's, not the why for's. Starting from the legalistic view that the Bible is to be read as a list of regulations that dictate every action, unscriptural rules are made against any use of alcohol, regulating what apparel a believer may wear or again, which presidential candidate he must vote for. When the basis for congregational worship is involved, the tendency is to skip over Christ crucified for us for Christ in us, from faith to obedience. Doctrine as a basis for church membership and fellowship is unacceptable because the Reformed have denied the efficacy of the Word itself. Thus, rather than to study the Bible to see if they are teaching properly, they tend to confine themselves to whether or not their people are living as "normal" Christians. Teaching correct doctrine is not that important to them as a church body because the Holy Spirit will see to it that proper understanding will be achieved. In short, the Reformed have a very different concept of reformation--one that is based upon the Law and obedience, not on the Gospel and faith. That brings up an important observation.

The Reformed are quick to state that while the Lutherans may have begun their reformation, they have not finished it. They still have ties with the superstitions and errors of the Roman Catholic Church. By this they mean that we have a church organization that is very tyrannical with pastors acting like little popes and executive secretaries running the show. It means that the Lutherans have still kept the superstitious notion that the sacraments actually do something to us, rather than merely express our decision for Christ. The Reformed have a tough time of understanding how we can call the papacy the antichrist, yet endeavor to preserve much of that church's ideas and concepts. The Reformed, therefore, look upon the Lutheran as a weaker brother who has not yet found the courage to completely remove himself from the Catholic Church. In reality, the opposite is true. It is the Reformed Church which has rejected the Reformation and turned onto a parallel course with the Roman Catholic Church.

Both elevate reason over Scripture, binding their members to rules God never commanded. Both cover over the Gospel with the Law, emphasizing a justification by performance. Both leave their members in doubt as to their real situation with God. Both show disregard to the Sacraments turning them into sacrifices, something we offer or do to God, rather than sacraments, something God does and gives to us. Both attempt to make the invisible Holy Christian Church visible. The Roman Catholic Church does it by its insistence that outside of her there is no salvation. The Reformed do it by trying to figure out who are the truly elect. Both, therefore, emphasize love or obedience as opposed to faith. Both emphasize revelation over Scripture either by their unwritten traditions or by their direct messages, dreams and visions by the Holy Ghost and reason. Both dwell on outward things, customs, and actions, but leave the heart unattended. Both condemn the Lutheran Church for limiting revelation and not giving the Law its due. Both insist that they get better results by demanding and commanding while the Lutherans seem to waste all their time merely telling their members they are forgiven, allowing their people to become lazy and indifferent.

"Duke George fought Luther all his life, but as his son lay dying, the duke said, "Call for a Lutheran minister." His daughter exclaimed, "But father, a Lutheran minister?" "Yes," he said, "call for a Lutheran minister." "But," she insisted, "you've opposed Luther all your life." Duke George replied, "Luther's message is good for the dying, but it's no good for the living." (Brinsmead)²⁰

Because the Reformed cannot understand the power of the Gospel applied only through Word and sacraments, they cannot understand the Lutherans. Even more so can they not understand the tremendous gulf that separates us. The Lutheran appears to be most unloving and unchristian when he refuses to worship or pray or join together with them. They, on the other hand, are so willing to agree, so ready to join, as Zwingli was at Marburg. It is so sad that they don't see that they have compromised the very thing that makes Christians Christian.

Yet we should also want to say that we are not condemning the Reformed to hell, as we do not say that about the Roman Catholic Church either. Their churches teach heresies that destroy faith because they end up denying Christ the Savior. Yet, because both churches do speak about the Savior, confused and mixed up as it may be, there are believers in those churches. The Reformed are mind-boggled that we would say that, but only because they fail to comprehend the saving power of the Gospel as opposed to the "saving proof" of performance. We only pray that the Reformed would stop and think about what Jesus says. In the meantime, we find that it is very difficult to communicate with the Reformed, for though we may use the same language, still the meanings of those words are so different that both churches talk past each other. The Reformed believe that they are in agreement with the Lutherans, while the Lutherans get frustrated because they cannot explain that the very heart of the way of salvation is at stake. Consider a few examples.

Terminology

Faith has been mentioned before and needs only to be repeated briefly. While the Lutheran separates faith from love, the Reformed have combined the two. Thus faith takes on a very strong flavor of activity, or obedience.

Gospel is a word thrown around, as is the word evangelical, Gospel-preaching. The Lutherans agree that the Bible uses the word Gospel to mean either the whole Word of God or just that which tells us about what God has done for us in Christ. The Reformed attempt to make the Gospel fit only the first meaning and even then speak of the Gospel as if it were Law.

Preaching—that may sound strange, but there is a difference. Lutherans are told that their sermons are wrong because they keep talking about justification and not sanctification, of Jesus and not on doing. The Reformed insist that they do a better job of preaching because they spend their time telling their people what is wrong and what they should do to make it right. But that is preaching the Law, again, and provides no incentive, Gospel incentive, for the people. It gets people going, but for the wrong reasons. The Lutherans do need to learn to use the third use of the law to instruct their people in how they should serve God, but they dare never do what the Reformed have done is substituting the how's for the why's.

Dead-orthodoxy is a term thrown around by the Reformed and misinterpreted by the Lutherans. When Lutherans hear the charge of dead-orthodoxy, they think of mere argumentation on correct doctrine without its application to daily lives. It is spending a full sermon explaining the genus apotelesmaticum but not answering the question that is on the lips of all the listeners, "So what?" When the Reformed speak of "dead-orthodoxy" they do not mean that at all. They are speaking of the Lutheran insistence that correct doctrine ensures the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. To them, only the most "fundamental" doctrines are important, the rest are not. To spend all our time and energy on instructing people in Christian doctrine is a wasteful mental exercise. To the Reformed doctrine finally is unimportant; the Holy Spirit will teach us to speak correctly without having to sit through a long drawn-out instruction class.

Various other terms are thrown around by both sides without realizing that both Lutheran and Reformed are talking past each other. Sacraments, conversion, salvation, sanctification, revelation, confessions, repentance, church, ministry, ministry of the keys, universal priesthood, sin, church and state, even Christ Himself are used without realizing that both churches have different understandings of what are meant. The differences may appear to be miniscule, yet they show that the Lutherans and the Reformed are worlds apart, not as close and as agreeable as many wish it to appear. That is why the Reformed books and movies are dangerous. They present many good and wholesome things, but are couched in a Reformed spirit that can entrap anyone who hasn't really learned the distinction between Law and Gospel and the importance of doing so.

A FEW PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

First of all, I hope I gave the writers their due. With the huge stack of notecards and the long time it took to finalize the wording, I may have repeated phrases verbatim from an author without giving him his credit. Secondly, I want it known that I have tried to be as objective as

possible, though you cannot help but see that I am strongly leaning toward the Lutheran side. Still, I tried to use the literature from both sides, comprehending their understandings before stating them. It was my intention to try to understand what makes the Reformed think and speak the way he does and why I seem to get so frustrated at not getting through to him. My training at the seminary told me that the biggest difference was with the Sacraments and with the way the Reformed change Gospel into Law. I always wondered how the two went together and why that difference was so very significant. If I have confused or overtaxed you, I beg your indulgence for I was writing this to answer my own question.

Concerning the Reformed and our relationship with them I should like to offer these thoughts. First of all, we must rejoice that despite all the false teachings, the Gospel is taught and can work in the hearts of their people. Let us never become so arrogant to the point where we deny that fact. Wherever the message of Jesus works, their will be results. Secondly, however, let us also remember that so long as these errors remain, errors that deal with what makes a Christian a Christian, we dare never let down our guard with cooperation, joint worship, etc. Even if we might not be affected by their spirit, we may be the cause that leads a weaker Christian to adopt the Reformed legalisms.

In another light, I become very leery when I hear of more and more Lutherans incorporating Reformed music and liturgies into their churches. I realize that the Bible makes no demand that we use page 5 or 15 all the time and permit no alternatives. Even I don't use it all the time, either. But considering the purpose and need for the "hype" in so many Reformed's minds to enable them to feel forgiven and Christian, my question is whether using Reformed songs and styles is an improvement over what we have. Personally I dislike the schmaltzy music that so often presents very lightweight messages, but then we have some of that in our own hymnal. A little dab will do you, as the old commercial says, but if we are trying to bring former Reformed people out of their legalistic and emotional security to focus on Christ and the written Word, are we not being counter-productive by using those things whereby the Reformed have strengthened their misapplied emotional self-centeredness? On the other hand, don't let anyone argue that Lutherans simply don't want to try anything new. Our synod merely resists falling head-over-heels for some new religious fad, as is often the case today. What is often forgotten is that older Lutherans have fought many a doctrinal battle against the Reformed teachings and have found a clear confession of their beliefs in the Lutheran liturgies. Lutherans will take on other liturgies provided they are as good as or better than page 5 or 15 in expressing the Gospel.

Another thought that has crossed my mind as I labored over this is whether or not our time is in need of a new confession. Certainly we have a hard enough time understanding and appreciating the ones we already have, but are not the problems facing our world and our Church requiring, even demanding, a clear pronouncement of Scripture? The Lutheran Confessions clearly summarize Christian teaching in the face of controversy and heresy. They are a treasure, a pearl of great price. Is it time for a new gem to be added to their collection?

Many a problem faces our Christian confession in the areas of theology and the application of those teachings. Self-centerednesses are expanding in power and are expressing themselves in sexual and familial mores (or the lack of them), in business and labor, in the judicial system, in political and economic arenas. Such rejections of Christian teaching powerfully tempt the Christian to review his faith and obedience to his God. For myself, however, I should prefer a confession that deals not with the symptoms of the problem, but with the problem itself. These sins are the ouches, the pains, that show that something is wrong. My personal consideration is not for a book of rules, but a rallying point against the deceptive and yet vocal enemies: humanism, higher criticism, and social gospelism.

Humanism is the direct opposite and complete denial of the first commandment. It replaces God with man and is the fundamental source of the practical problems facing our world. With humanism as its foundation, higher criticism rejects and replaces the second and third commandments dealing with God, His name and reputation, and His Word. It is the denial

that reduces the Bible to words of men about God rather than God's Words about Himself to men. It undermines the truthfulness and reliability of the Scriptures by insisting that social customs and inventions should guide the interpretation of Scripture, not the Scripture directing how society shall act. Such a situation already exists within the Roman Catholic Church and its "traditions" and within the Reformed Church and its worship of reason and "revelation". It is also the concept that has invaded much of the Lutheran Church in ways that appear to be only practical areas, not real attacks on Scripture at all. But there is no difference between theology and religion as some are wont to suggest, since theology is nothing else than the study of Scripture's teachings and "religion" being the application of those teachings in daily life.

Together with those two attacks on God and His Word comes the third partner, social gospel. This is the attempt to "practice God's Law" without either God or His Law. It is an attempt to separate the last seven commandments from the first three. It is the attempt to make Jesus say: "This is the first and only commandment, that ye love one another, loving thy neighbor as thyself." Such a concept perverts the whole of Christianity and makes our obedience not directed to God but to men. Sin is not against God, but only against men. Love is centered in such gobbledygook words as "freedom", "liberty" and "rights", having little resemblance to the Savior dying on the cross for sin, and housing within them a strong latent core of selfish and sinful standards and rules, or more precisely, the lack of them. It is the cry: "We don't need you, God! We can do better ourselves!"

The problem of the sins and false teachings that plague the Christian Church today are not little independent problems that result from sporadic sinfulness. They are the spin-offs of the growing attempt to dethrone God, to disembowel His precious Word and to defrock His Law with cheap and illusionary philosophies. In reality, they are nothing but a final application of the cry: "deeds, not creeds!" Forget what God says, forget what a believer should believe, just believe. Ignore specified limits and boundaries of obedience and love, just love-whatever feels right. Whenever reason overshadows Scripture man replaces God as King and Ruler over all. While many may adopt God's Law at first, yet the reason for obeying God is lost because the Gospel of God's love for sinners through Jesus has been replaced by man's obedience. Sooner or later God is forgotten and no longer needs to be obeyed. Once the motivation for obeying God's Law is gone, the next reaction is to replace God's Law, for it no longer has any eternal and almighty power behind it. It has become the rules ancient men once believed God wanted. Those archaic rules and traditions must be replaced with something "more in keeping with today's society". Once that becomes the standard for rules, the whole concept of rules is gone. Lawlessness and anarchy, rebellion and terrorism become the way of life--all because there has been a total rejection of God. Is that not what Jesus was saying in Matthew 13:12: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." Those who refuse the Gospel message will ultimately, in one way or another, lose their knowledge and appreciation of God's Law...either the written Law or the Law written in their hearts. Perhaps it will not run the full route in them, but in their children, in the members of their churches. Is that not what has been happening in the Christian arena? Has not the Gospel been replaced by the Law? Is not the Law being replaced by situational ethics and just plain lawlessness?

What is needed are not more "how to" books but why's. What is needed is not a "getting back to the Bible's rules" but to God's forgiveness in Christ. What we need is not a confession dealing with all the different symptoms of these problems, which then becomes much like a constitution and by-laws that often includes over-reactions to a problem facing a congregation. I suggest that we should begin with the problems themselves and define what Scripture says about itself. Then the two opinions should be allowed to express the logical conclusions they must necessarily follow. In the meantime, should that confession ever take shape, let us all endeavor to understand and educate our people in this most dangerous challenge to our faith and eternity.

Now to some more practical thoughts. How do you reach those Reformed people who come to our churches? Let me first say that it is much easier to reach Roman Catholics who come

to us because they are under the yoke of the first use of the Law. Here I realize that for former Missourians, that may appear confusing. WELS Catechisms number the three uses of God's Law as mirror, curb and guide, while the old blue LCMS catechism switched the first two. The order is of little importance, though the Formula of Concord sides with the blue, not the tan catechism. At any rate, Catholics know they are sinners and hearing the unfettered Gospel often makes them react as if an anvil just fell off of their shoulders. With the Reformed that is not always true.

Their yoke is not the use of the Law that condemns them, but the use that makes them feel secure. Many of their churches deny original sin and therefore have never taught their people just how corrupt and depraved the sinful nature is. That makes their will and reason so "trustworthy", while in reality it is one of their gravest enemies. Another problem is a seemingly repetitious attitude that speaks to people in this way: "Jesus saves you, believe Him. Now that you've got that, we can set Him aside for other things, the Law." Thus while training people in all the how to's to be a Christian, these churches often fail to keep before their people the why's to thank the Savior. Such concepts often lead some of the Reformed people to see that they are captive to a catch-22 situation. They are told that the elect are saved, but their election is proven not by faith, but by their performance. Yet despite their attempts to reach the concept of the "good Christian", they also know they sin and fall far from where God says they should be. If they are truly elect, they should be sanctified, but they sin, and, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is overshadowed by the Law and its rules, there is little comfort in forgiveness offered. If they continue to stay active or try to put on a happy and confident face, they know that it is a facade and that only makes them more guilty and more zealous to prove themselves elect by their works. They are supposed to be happy, but they are not because they don't understand the sinful nature and the Gospel with its assuring cure. But they dare not express that unhappiness or uncertainty because that would mean that they are not among the elect. This, by the way, is not of my own idea, but feelings expressed by former Reformed people who were looking for truth and reality and comfort.

When people comprehend that predicament, they are easier to reach since a good dose of the distinction between Law and Gospel and original sin will lead them out from under that yoke. But many others come who do not appreciate that problem, nor yet have forsaken the idea that true doctrine is only a mental exercise. Such people again can be reached only by preaching the Law and Gospel. Original sin must be taught in all its severity, together with its continual problem. The will and reason must be captured and made subservient to the Word. Finally, it must be shown that we cannot dictate the actions of every Christian and that the Holy Spirit gives differing amounts of gifts and talents and differing time. In short, these people must be led to reject outward appearances for the promise of the Gospel.

Then there are the Lutherans who begin to exhibit Reformed tendencies. Charismatics, visionaries, sanctificationists come and go from time to time and disturb the congregation with their pratings. First of all, we must remember not to laugh at them. They are God's people who are showing either ignorance of God's Word or the inability to cope with their own progress in sanctification. The exuberance and the faddism of many Reformed ideas arouses emotions in them that the plain old message of God's Word never did--not because it can't, but because they never let it. On the other hand, people who do strive zealously for more and more knowledge of the Word become impatient with those who don't or have not. Their own real exuberance finds frustration in the often seeming "apathy" of other members and their own pastor's "reluctance" to force people to do something for God. What about such people?

First of all, he who claims to have a vision from God, may just have a vision from God. I doubt it, but it can happen, can't it? Here we must remember that the Bible always points us back to the written Word, not to private revelations. "But if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Always deal with the written Word, do not argue on the possibility of revelations. That will only make them more defensive. These people are striving for assurance and have turned within themselves, not to God. They are weak Christians who are convincing themselves that they are strong, since God chose them for a vision.

Similarly, we must deal with the person who begins to dictate who is a Christian and who isn't, who is growing in his sanctification and who isn't. First of all, recognize that we are called to grow as Christians. We are also called by God to encourage one another to grow. But still are far from telling people what they shall do and how much. Sometimes, this too is a person who has forsaken the Gospel as the saving message and turned to the Law for assurance. On the other hand, it may be someone who understands the distinction, but who has not yet learned to apply the Gospel, preferring to get action via the Law. In either case, one must deal with a weak Christian, one who has much to learn. They need to be shown just how they are placing their superiority in Law and not in Gospel. They need to learn that sometimes "overly-active" sanctification can be more disruptive of God's Church than small growths. If discipline is needed, let it be centered upon the use or misuse of the Law as taught by such a person. Let it be centered on the lack of love for fellow Christians and the hidden desire to play God. But beware of argumentation...we all like to do it, but it does not accomplish much.

As Lutherans, we need to continually review the difference between the Law and Gospel and keep teaching it to our people. We also need to teach the third use of the Law as a guide, but always careful to beware of the extremes that can happen. Above all, do not be deceived by the attempt to "get back to the Bible". That is usually a front for something based on the Law and reason, not on the Gospel and faith. Teach these things to your children, your family, your church, for without it we quickly lose the comfort for our souls. When such things arise that would destroy them, be gentle, kind, patient, yet "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

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