

CHAPTER 4

THE SCRIPTURE AS SOURCE AND NORM IN LUTHER AND THE CONFESSIONS

No treatment of the doctrine of Scripture as source and norm would be complete without a representation of what Luther and our Confessions say on the subject. An exhaustive treatment, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. In addition to these representative statements, This We Believe is a booklet that deals with many basic doctrines, particularly those in contention during the synodical controversies of the fifties and early sixties. The booklet received the unanimous approval of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod in convention in 1967. As such it has a degree of confessional status among us in the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod. The relevant portions of this statement will be treated as well.

SCRIPTURE IN LUTHER'S WRITINGS

As we place side by side some of Luther's statements on Scripture, no question remains about the position Scripture is to have in the church, with its teachers or in the hearts of the people of God. For Luther, too, there is no other source or authority. Peace with God is found nowhere else. The Holy Christian Church has no marks apart from those God has determined to use, namely his means of grace. The church of Jesus Christ has no other mission than to use those means to bring people into fellowship with God.

To begin, Luther establishes the responsibility of the church to be the servant of God through the proclamation of his Word. This responsibility is the essence of the church's work. The church is a gathering of believers around the means of grace through which the Holy Spirit does his saving and sanctifying work. He reveals himself in and through the vehicle of his Word. No human authority can replace what God himself has already given us.

But here in the church he should speak nothing except the Word of this rich Head of the household; otherwise it is not the true church. Therefore this must be the rule: God is speaking. So it must be in this world... That is why a preacher, by virtue of his commission and office, is administering the household of God and dare say nothing but what God says and commands. And although much talking is done which is outside the Word of God, yet the church is not established by such talk, though men were to turn mad in their insistence on it.¹

To Luther, the church has only one mission, namely, to preach the Word of God. Luther is speaking of the popes and councils when he speaks of the talk of men. What he has to say could well be applied to all the material available in pastoral counseling and psychology. The church may be involved in that work and use that material to some degree, but counseling never becomes the reason for the church's existence and counseling materials or other materials never become the church's source and norm.

Since the church has the responsibility to use the Word of God, Luther points out the necessity of recognizing the difference between the Word of God and the word of men as well as the relative authority of each. The church that is committed to the Word of God will not allow anything to rival that authority. As members of a church subject to the Word of God, we submit ourselves to the rule of the Word of God and make our judgments on doctrine and practice as servants of God.

1. Luther's Works, vol. 51 (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia 1966), pages 305-306.

The church is indeed able to do this: it can distinguish the Word of God from the words of men... Not that the church is therefore above the Gospel; for in that case it should also be above the God in whom we believe, because the church proclaims that He is God... But the truth itself it cannot judge but is obliged to say with unerring certainty that it is indeed the truth... It is taken captive by the truth; it does not judge the truth but is judged by the truth. ²

Luther's conviction that believers are subject to the Word of God gives the blessing of security in faith and life. This security comes from total dependence on God. The Word teaches that security. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to create security.

It is the will of the Lord Christ that all true Christians have and follow the manner and artlessness of children. For children cling to the truth. A child will let itself be drawn by what it hears and has no opinion or argument to offer. A child does not ask whether what one tells him is right or wrong but believes everything. Just so Christians should simply cling to the Word alone and not argue as to whether God is lying or telling the truth. They are simply to believe it because Christ says it. ³

Human reason does not willingly submit to the authority of God or his Word. It is the nature of a man to be his own authority even where the Word of God is concerned. This refusal to submit to God and his rule through his Word, Luther maintains, can be found in church bodies as well as in individuals. The most unfortunate aspect of this refusal to submit to God's authority is that eternal life itself can easily be lost in the process. Only he who faithfully allows God to speak through the Word can be sure of what he is saying and hearing. In Luther's thought, no matter how dedicated a teacher might be or how helpful his material might appear, it cannot take the place of what the Word of God can do.

Not only teachers and counselors can ignore the fundamental work of the church and the fundamental teachings of the Word of God. We

2. Ibid., vol. 36, page 107-108.

3. W 47, 251 - E 44, 32 - SL 7, 879.

and our people must guard against preoccupation with particular problems to the point that we forget the one thing needful. The Word of God keeps us and the problems we face in the perspective of the cross and eternal salvation. That perspective is not only essential for counseling, it is essential for life itself.

But it does behoove me to know what God has prescribed, what He has promised, and what He has threatened in the Word. If you meditate diligently on these things, you will find God, yea, He Himself will draw you into His arms. If you fall from that place of security, that is, if you presume to want to know something beyond what is revealed in the Word, you will plunge into the abyss of hell.⁴

Luther contends that the responsibility of the church is to dedicate herself to the study and proclamation of God's Word alone. Nothing can be added by human reason or by the authority of the church. Luther directs us to a more thorough study and knowledge of the Word of God. God wants us to know him in his holy grace and man cannot add to what God has already said about it. His saving grace revealed in his inspired Word is our only authority.

...Labor and effort enough are required to hold our own when we simply stay with the Word. What will happen when a person flutters about in confusion with his reason and thoughts? If we had been able to hit upon saving truth with our reason, it would not have been necessary for God to speak from heaven, to let the Word ring out, and to enclose and bind everything in the Word. Apart from His divine Word, God has given no other means whereby Christ is to be heard.⁵

In counseling and psychology we deal with emotions constantly. That does not mean that the work of the church is to deal exclusively with emotions. The emotional needs people have must be addressed. The Word of God addresses them with historical fact as the foundation for faith and life. Luther's advice is to stay with the Word of God. With the emphasis we find on emotionalism around us today, the advice is

4. Op. Cit., vol. 3, page 139.

5. W 28, 608 f - E 36, 261 f - SL 3, 1720.

certainly in place. With the Word of God as our standard we neither deny that we must deal with emotions, nor do we allow ourselves to be controlled by them or by the need to deal with them. Instead we provide the security that comes only from the Word of God and the voice of the Good Shepherd. He rules all that we believe and do.

A Christian lives on in full, assured hope. He eats, drinks, works, does what he has been commanded to do. Yea, I dare say, he also suffers with joy whatever suffering is placed on him. For his ears hang on the voice and Word of his Shepherd, and he schools himself not to judge by what he experiences and feels but by what the voice and Word says. ⁶

He who would enter the kingdom of Christ must pass beyond all feeling and be carried into a region where sensation is nothing. For we are not to judge by feeling. Therefore if conscience accuses you of sin, if it sets the wrath of God before your eyes, if it tears Christ, the Redeemer, from you, you must not assent but must judge against your conscience and feelings that God is not angry and that you are not damned. For Scripture says that the kingdom of Christ lies beyond (extra) the domain of feeling. Therefore we must judge against our feeling. ⁷

While emotions change from day to day and even hour to hour, the Word of God remains constant. We can depend on the Word even when it seems there is nothing to depend on. In fact, at times of hopelessness we can see more clearly than ever that God was the one we needed all along. Shouldn't this be the real aim of genuine Christian counseling?

It is no small comfort to know that grace has not been taken away but is truly constant and unchangeable. Nevertheless, our feeling and awareness of grace (experientia) are removed for a while, and fear and trembling set in, dejecting and disturbing the soul. The effect is that a man turns impatient and imagines that the wrath of God is unbearable and so turns God into a devil. ⁸

6. W 52, 281 - E 2, 224 - SL 13a, 561 on John 10:12-16.

7. Op. Cit., vol. 17, 388-389.

8. Ibid., vol. 3, page 8.

SCRIPTURE IN THE CONFESSIONS

Although the Confessions of the Book of Concord do not contain a separate article that deals specifically with the place of Scripture as source and norm for doctrine and practice, they do contain numerous references to Scripture and its authority. Taken together, our Confessions form a clear position statement for all truly Lutheran theology.

The Confessions clearly indicate the authority of God's Word as well as the essential purpose for which it was given. The Scripture is God's clear revelation for faith and life. This revelation is essential to gaining a proper perspective and direction for Christian counseling as well as Christian living.

Since all Scripture given by inspiration of God, is to serve, not for security and impenitence but for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 2 Tm 3:16; also since everything in God's Word has been prescribed to us, not that we should thereby be driven into despair but that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope, Ro 15:4, therefore it is without any doubt in no way the sound sense or right use of the doctrine concerning the eternal foreknowledge of God that either impenitence or despair should be occasioned or strengthened thereby.⁹

The Word of God equips us and our people for good works and does so in the light of our eternal salvation. This is the goal of all truly Christian counseling. Change in behavior is motivated by the gospel to the glory of God. A change in behavior to make life easier for the sufferer or those who suffer with him is a short-sighted goal. Secular counselors and Christian counselors both desire to effect a change in troubled people, but the reason for the change and the motivation are completely different. The secular counselor measures his success by whether the person he counsels seems to behave better, while the Christian counselor measures his success by whether the person has a better

9. FC, XI, Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia 1921), page 1067.

relationship with God. The Word of God is the only power that can accomplish both desirable change and an improved relationship with God.

1. We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas, together with teachers, should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone, as it is written Ps 119:105: Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. And St. Paul: Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed. Ga 1:8.

In this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament and all other writings is preserved, and the Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule, and standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong. ¹⁰

The Preface of the Augsburg Confession states the importance of practice that is uniform among the theologians who subscribe to it. As with all the gifts God gives to his church, pastors will have a varying degree of competence and interest in pastoral counseling and psychology. To some counseling may be an extremely important part of the ministry that deserves and requires a great deal of time and study. To others counseling may make only occasional demands. By no means does this suggest that the doctrine and the practice of individual pastors varies along with the degree of competence and involvement. The Word of God is the touchstone. Only the capability of applying it under special circumstances varies.

We should not neglect or reject the doctrine of the divine Word on account of abuse or misunderstanding, but precisely on that account, in order to avert all abuse and misunderstanding, the true meaning should and must be explained from the foundation of the Scriptures. ¹¹

Human wisdom and reason are not substitutes for faithfulness to the Word of God. We have the gift of his pure Word only by the grace of God. We must treasure that gift above all others. The Word teaches the

10. FC, Preface, Ibid., pages 777-779.

11. FC, XI, Ibid., page 1063.

truth we need to know and shows us where error exists.

We reject and condemn everything that is not in accordance with, but contrary and opposed to, the doctrine recorded above (of the Holy Supper) and thoroughly grounded in God's Word.¹²

Nothing...should be sought for more earnestly and prayerfully from Almighty God than that both our churches and our schools should have persevered in the pure doctrine of God's Word.¹³

When the Word of God is the standard for making all our judgments of therapies and counseling materials available to us, we also have the equipment to warn against whatever is contrary to the Word of God. Among secular psychologists, for example, it is not unusual for a counselor to suggest that a person whose marriage is troubled should have an extra-marital affair either to rekindle a spark of love or to get even for some wrong that has been done. None of us could ever recommend such a counselor or his ideas to one of our members. Most departures from Scripture are not that dramatic, but Scripture is still the authority when we judge them as being harmful or helpful in Christian counseling.

(We have taken account of how) the pure Christian doctrine could be fortified and strengthened against corruption and perversions by the testimonies of Holy Scripture, in order that in the course of time, under its guise, godless doctrine might not be concealed, but an altogether unvarnished declaration of the truth might be transmitted to posterity.¹⁴

It seemed exceedingly necessary that, amidst so many errors that have arisen in our times...there should exist a godly explanation and agreement concerning all these controversies, derived from God's Word, according to the terms of which the pure doctrine might be discriminated and separated from the false.¹⁵

The matter of doctrinal unity is important in the area of Christian counseling and psychology. We understand our common foundation when we examine the wide variety of therapies available today both within Christian circles and within secular circles. We need Scripture

12. FC, VII, Ibid., page 1015.

13. Historical Introduction, Ibid., page 9.

14. Ibid., page 13.

15. Ibid., page 21.

as our source and norm so that all therapies may be tested against the truth of God's Word. With that standard we will probably come to the same general conclusions about the relative value of other authorities and therapies are available today.

1. First, then, we receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged.¹⁶

If we fail to make a full presentation of God's Word setting forth the truth and rejecting the error, we are being unfaithful to the charge we have accepted. More importantly, we are profaning the name of God.

The name of God is profaned...when men preach, teach and speak in the name of God what is false and misleading, so that His name must serve to adorn and to find a market for falsehood. That is indeed the greatest profanation and dishonor of the divine name.¹⁷

The Word of God is the sanctuary above all sanctuaries, yea, the only one which we Christians should know and have. For, though we had the bones of all saints or all holy and consecrated garments in a heap, still that would help us nothing; for all that is a dead thing which can sanctify nobody. But God's Word is the treasure which sanctifies everything, and by which the saints themselves were sanctified.¹⁸

The Holy Spirit has chosen the vehicle through which he works saving faith. Justification by grace through faith is the primary work of the Holy Spirit. We dare never forget that central purpose of Scripture or the central goal of eternal salvation in anything we do as pastors. When that priority is established, all the other blessings God wills for us to have will be ours.

Since the Holy Ghost wishes to be efficacious through the Word, and to strengthen and give power and ability, it is God's will that we should receive the Word, believe and obey it.¹⁹

16. FC, Preface, Ibid., pages 849-851.

17. LC, First Petition, Ibid., page 709.

18. LC, Third Commandment, Ibid., page 607.

19. FC, XI, Ibid., page 1073.

We are simply to believe with all humility and obedience the plain, firm, clear and solemn words and command of our Creator and Redeemer, without any doubt and disputation as to how it agrees with our reason or whether it is possible. For these words were spoken by that Lord who is infinite Wisdom and Truth itself.²⁰ He can execute and accomplish everything which He promises.

In those things which concern the spoken outward Word we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may be protected against the enthusiasts, spirits who boast that they have the spirit without and before the Word, and, accordingly, judge Scripture or the spoken Word and explain and stretch it at their pleasure.²¹

To accomplish his purpose, God uses both the law and gospel. They both do effectively what God planned for them to do. Each is separate and distinct from the other. The confusion of law and gospel can have disastrous effects. This is an extremely important distinction to keep in mind when doing the work of Christian counseling and when considering the work of others in the field.

Among Christian writers it is not difficult to find those who stress the law almost to the exclusion of the gospel. We almost never find a clear presentation of the gospel for the sake of forgiveness and motivation. We may not always find statements with which we must disagree. We must also be aware of the failure to present material, particularly the gospel, that should be offered, but isn't.

Today more writers are willing to speak of sin and its consequences in their writings than were evident before the 1960's. Carl Menninger's book, Whatever Became of Sin helped to make that change in some respects. Still, these usually ignore the distinction between law and gospel. Counselors tell us, for example, that we are not to present a depressed person with his own sinfulness because that person already feels bad enough. This approach ignores the fact that Christians con-

20. FC, VII, Ibid., page 989.

21. SA, III, 8, Ibid., page 495.

front sin so they can confess it and receive the assurance of absolution for it. Avoiding that confrontation cannot promote genuine healing.

For the two chief works of God in men are these: to terrify, and to justify and quicken those who have been terrified. Into these two works all Scripture has been distributed. The one part is the Law, which shows, reproveth, and condemns sins. The other part is the Gospel, the promise of grace bestowed in Christ, and this promise is constantly repeated in the whole of Scripture, first having been delivered to Adam, afterwards to the patriarchs; then, still more clearly proclaimed by the prophets; lastly, preached and set forth among the Jews by Christ; and disseminated over the entire world by the apostles. For all the saints were justified by faith in this promise, and not by their own attrition or contrition.²²

1. 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.

2. We believe, teach, and confess that the law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God and reproveth everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.

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.

6. But if the law and the Gospel, likewise also Moses himself a teacher of the law and Christ as a preacher of the Gospel are contrasted with one another, we believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message, which does not reprove or terrify, but comforts consciences against the terrors of the law, points alone to the merit of Christ, and raises them up again by the lovely preaching of the grace and favor of God obtained through Christ's merit.²³

The exposition on the law and gospel in the Formula of Concord reminds us that the law cannot produce a godly life. Only the gospel can provide the proper motivation. When the gospel is not presented properly to motivate repentance, no works that are good in God's eyes can come from the presentation of the law.

22. AC, XII(V), Ibid., page 265.

23. FC, V, Ibid., pages 801-805.

We unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the law is properly a divine doctrine, in which the righteous, immutable will of God is revealed. It shows what is to be the quality of man in his nature, thoughts, words, and works, in order that he may be pleasing and acceptable to God. The law threatens its transgressors with God's wrath and temporal and eternal punishments.²⁴

The Bible alone can provide a clear and accurate presentation of the nature of the human being. This essential point is missing from all secular psychotherapies. The nature of a man will never be clearly understood without a willingness to admit that the Bible speaks the truth. Any counseling technique that fails to acknowledge the total depravity of man, the old sinful flesh, our natural inclination toward evil and our complete inability to change the situation without God's intervention will ultimately fail. Conversely, a faithful recognition of man's sin and God's grace will always work as God sees fit when it is faithfully applied.

For everything that comforts, that offers the favor and grace of God to transgressors of the law, is, and is properly called, the Gospel, a good and joyful message that God will not punish sins, but forgive them for Christ's sake.

Therefore every penitent sinner ought to believe, that is place his confidence in the Lord Christ alone, that He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification, Ro 4:25, that He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, 2 Cor 5:21, who of God is made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption, 1 Cor 1:30, whose obedience is counted to us for righteousness before God's strict tribunal, so that the law, as above set forth, is a ministration that kills through the letter and preaches condemnation, 2 Cor 3, 6, 9, but the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, Ro 1:16, that preaches righteousness and gives the Spirit, 1 Cor 1:18; Ga 3:2.²⁵

This declaration of law and gospel has always been the work of the church of true believers. Along with the faithful presentation of these doctrines we have the difficult responsibility to distinguish properly between them.

24. FC, V, Ibid., pages 957-959.

25. Idem.

These two doctrines, we believe and confess, should ever and ever be diligently inculcated in the Church of God even to the end of the world, although with the proper distinction of which we have heard, in order that, through the preaching of the law and its threats in the ministry of the New Testament, the hearts of impenitent men may be terrified and brought to a knowledge of their sins and to repentance. This should not be in such a way that they lose heart and despair in this process, but that (since the law is a schoolmaster unto Christ that we might be justified by faith, Ga 3:24, and thus points and leads us not from Christ, but to Christ, who is the end of the law, Ro 10:4) they be comforted and strengthened again by the preaching of the holy Gospel concerning Christ, our Lord, namely, that to those who believe the Gospel, God forgives all their sins through Christ, adopts them as children for His sake, and out of pure grace, without any merit on their part, justifies and saves them; however, not in such a way that they may abuse the grace of God and sin, hoping for grace, as Paul, 2 Cor 3:7-9. It thoroughly and forcibly shows the distinction between the law and the Gospel. ²⁶

As we have seen, the work of the church is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in faithfulness to the Word of God. As a Christian church body the Word of God is our identifying mark. Just as our people have come to realize that they will hear God's Word in church on Sunday morning, they should be able to expect that they will hear God's Word in the privacy of the counseling office. We have no reason to apologize for having only one tool. At the same time we can become especially competent to declare the Word in special counseling situations. Our people certainly need the help. National statistics show us how much trouble people have with stress, depression, anxiety, marital problems, finances, drugs and alcohol, raising children, communicating with others in their own families, self-esteem, self-confidence and so on. The Bible has something to say to all of these problems. It addresses sin in its reality and gives grace for healing.

The church has become one of many places to look for help in our modern times. More people are looking for help than ever before. Many church bodies have assumed the task of helping in any or all of these

26. Idem.

situations, but their work can't be much better than any secular helping agency without a clear distinction between the law and gospel and a clear presentation of both. On the other hand, we cannot claim the Word of God and hold onto it for ourselves without testifying to the fact that the law and gospel have something to say to our people. They need to know that we are willing to expend the time and effort to work together to find out what Scripture says together with them.

SCRIPTURE IN THIS WE BELIEVE

The fifties and sixties were difficult years because of the intersynodical controversies. Attention focused on the doctrine of fellowship and the position of Scripture as source and norm for doctrine and practice. Questions needed clear and direct answers. Is the Bible the Word of God at all? Is it completely, mostly or partly the Word of God? To what extent should the church be associated with activities other than preaching the Word of God? To what extent is it a social organization? What is necessary to establish a basis for ecumenical activity? A clear and concise statement of faith was necessary to affirm the unified position that already existed among the theologians of the synod. When This We Believe was presented to the convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod of 1967, it was adopted unanimously as a precise statement of the doctrinal position of the Wisconsin Synod on the matters in question.

In addition to the confessional value of this little booklet, it holds value as a statement of doctrine, both positive and negative, for all members of the synod. Its style makes it helpful for instruction

and for renewed instruction in the doctrines of God's Word.

I. GOD AND HIS REVELATION

Not everyone who speaks about God is doing so from the knowledge Scripture provides. The natural knowledge of God does provide some understanding. That natural knowledge, however, is insufficient to save the sinner. Without Scripture no complete and correct knowledge of God can exist. Anyone can write material that sounds biblical in some points. It is possible to write material from the natural knowledge of God and the law written in our hearts without using the Bible at all. But such material can never reveal the full plan of God. The will of God centers in the gospel which must be revealed through Scripture.

2. We believe that God has revealed himself in nature, for "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps 19:1). "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Ro 1:20). So there is no excuse for the atheist. However, we have in nature only a partial revelation of God and one that is wholly insufficient for salvation.

Scripture is God's message for the salvation of sinners by his love revealed perfectly in Jesus Christ. No declaration of Scripture is complete without focus on this central message.

4. We believe that God has given the Holy Scriptures to proclaim his grace in Christ to man. In the Old Testament God repeatedly promised his people a divine Deliverer from sin, death and hell. The New Testament proclaims that this promised Deliverer has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The Scriptures testify of Christ. Jesus himself says of the Scriptures that they "testify about me" (Jn 5:39).

Scripture cannot be divided to speak against itself nor can we ignore the unified whole of Scripture. It is improper to concentrate on one portion of what Scripture says to the exclusion of the central point. An accurate presentation of the law is insufficient without the

gospel. The gospel does not reach the heart of sinful man without the preparation the law makes. All too often so-called biblical material fails to meet this standard. This is the case especially in the field of pastoral counseling. The presentation of both law and gospel are especially necessary when we deal with specific guilt and the specific need for the application of grace as we do in pastoral counseling. Both law and gospel are necessary and both must be distinguished properly.

7. We believe that Scripture is a unified whole, true and without error in everything it says, for our Savior said: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35). We believe that it, therefore, is the infallible authority and guide for everything we believe and do. We believe that it is fully sufficient, clearly teaching us all we need to know for salvation, making us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tm 3:15), equipping us for every good word (2 Tm 3:17). No other revelations are to be expected.

VI THE MEANS OF GRACE

God chose to use the Word and sacraments to convey the blessing of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. We are bound by this choice. At the same time we are blessed by the choice because we know where we can find God and the salvation he provides in Christ.

2. We believe that through the gospel of Christ's atoning sacrifice for sinners the Holy Spirit works faith in the heart of man, whose heart by nature is enmity against God. Scripture teaches that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17). This Spirit-wrought faith, or regeneration, brings about a renewal in man and makes of him an heir of eternal salvation.

This short section of THIS WE BELIEVE calls to mind the essential article of Christianity, justification accomplished by the redemption Christ earned at the cost of his own life. With sin comes an accompanying debt that must be paid. Scripture teaches that we owe our lives to God because we are sinners. The gospel teaches that life instead of

death is a gift of God that was earned when Jesus paid the debt we owe (Rm 6:23). That is the source of real comfort and peace with God. Any other peace is only an empty imitation of the real thing.

Our responsibility is to distinguish between law and gospel as well as to deliver them. When the law is used to do the gospel's work, the result will very likely be a moralizing caricature of the gospel and not a saving and healing presentation.

6. We reject any views that look for the revelation of the grace of God and salvation apart from the gospel as found in the Scriptures. We likewise reject the view that the law is a means of grace.

VII THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTRY

Various writers in the field of pastoral counseling and psychology lay strong emphasis on the power of the church as a healing agency. We cannot think of the church, though, apart from the Word of God. We come to faith through the means of grace. They are the marks of the church. They are the tools with which we work. With that emphasis properly in place we can think of the church as a healing agency. It is the place where the Word of comfort and peace is found. The people of the church gather to preach the Word and to be edified together by it. The church is a gathering of believers who reflect the love that God has for them and for all people. The concern believers show is a concern that God created in them when he made them kings and priests before him. As such the church is a natural fellowship for conveying the love and forgiveness of God. Love and forgiveness are at the root of healing all the special needs of the individuals who allow us to minister to them.

Love is something that many church bodies wish to convey in their relationship with their community. That is very properly the case. One

wonders at times, however, just how deep that love actually is. How much does it mean to say, "God loves you and we love you?" We can only guess. On the other hand, we do know the love of God in Christ Jesus. We do have his Word to grow in love and convey it. We cannot ignore the responsibility and the privilege we have as a gathering of believers to let that light shine before men.

4. We believe that it is the Lord's will that Christians gather together for mutual edification and spiritual growth (He 10:24,25) and for carrying out the whole of the Lord's commission (Mk 16:15). Since these visible gatherings (for example, congregations, synods) confess themselves to the marks of the church and make use of them, they are called churches. They bear this name, however, only because of the true believers present in them (1 Cor 1:2).

THIS WE BELIEVE does call to mind the fact that the work we do as Christians begins with a solid unity of doctrine in the Word of God. The term, non-denominational, that we hear and see so often has done much to undermine the essence of true unity. If unity of doctrine is not necessary for doing our work together, then all that unites us is a common problem to deal with. For example, some believe it doesn't make any difference whether you are a Christian or an unbeliever, you still have stresses to deal with. They think one person can deal with stress in the same way as another. What a person believes about the Bible makes no difference.

No Christian counselor could allow such a belief. Stress is essentially caused by things that are beyond our control. How can we deal with things beyond our control if we do not know the almighty and gracious God who never loses control? No matter how many exercises a person does, therapy will only be effective when the stressed person realizes that he has a responsibility to do what God has given him the strength and talents to do and to place all of it in God's hands for the final blessings that God wants him to have. The Christian can do all

this within the fold of the visible church where God provides him with the Word and with the company of other believers who need edification as much as he does. God controls it all.

The matter of community is important in Christian counseling and psychology. We need to be sure that we understand this concept as the Bible teaches it and not in the perverted sense of those who seek a fellowship of care and concern. A great deal has been written about the importance of this aspect of Christian counseling. Taken in its biblical sense it is a beautiful and comforting edification for the troubled sinner. Without that biblical sense we are doing nothing that could not be done just as well by compassionate pagans. Modern writings list numerous helping professions. People can find help and support for just about anything they might face from alcohol and drug abuse to child abuse to coping with terminal illness to dealing with unwanted pregnancies of unmarried girls to Alzheimer's Disease and A.I.D.S. The one thing that all of these helping and supporting agencies have in common with us is a desire to help and support. What separates them from us is the foundation of the Word of God.

6. We believe that God bids us on our part to acknowledge oneness in faith among God's saints on earth only as they by word and deed reveal (confess) the faith of their hearts. Their unity becomes evident when they agree in their confession to the doctrine revealed in Scripture. We believe, furthermore, that the individual through his membership in a church body confesses himself to the doctrine and practice of that body. To assert that unity exists where there is no agreement in confession is to presume to look into man's heart. This only God can do. It is not necessary that all agree on matters of church ritual or organization. About these the New Testament gives no commands.

We do have a serious responsibility to be concerned about others and to carry the burdens of others. This concern comes from the unity of faith that exists within the fellowship of the church which is united in doctrine and practice on the Word of God. We have a mandate to live

that mutual concern in our practice but we cannot do so without the Word to unite us.

The privileged position of each Christian before God carries with it responsibility as well as comfort. It is easy to think that God must make problems go away or give us the strength to meet daily challenges the way we want to meet them. If he doesn't meet them that way we may think he has forsaken us. That is not the case. God calls us to submit to his rule and will. That means he has called us to accept ourselves for what he has made of us, kings and priests before him for Jesus' sake. But he is God alone. This is one of the most essential, yet one of the most overlooked aspects of Christian counseling. The answers to many of our daily problems comes down to a simple willingness to submit to God's rule and trust his love.

8. We believe that every Christian is a priest and king before God (1 Pe 2:9). All believers have direct and equal access to the throne of grace through Christ, our Mediator (Eph 2:17,18). To all believers God has given the means of grace to use. All Christians are to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pe 2:9). In this sense all Christians are ministers of the gospel.

The duties of the pastor may vary from time to time as will his interests. Counseling is only one of many duties. Counseling is becoming increasingly important and the qualifications for the work must increase accordingly. Our motive is not only to be more ready to help our people before someone else does. Our motive for competence in the application of the Word of God is always ultimately the glory of God who gives us the privilege of doing his work. In this area, too, we are spokesmen for God.

9. We believe that it is the will of God that the church in accordance with good order (1 Cor 14:40) call qualified men (1 Tm 3) into the public ministry. They are to preach the Word and administer the sacraments publicly, that is, not merely as individuals who possess the universal priesthood, but by order and in the name of fellow

Christians. These men are the called servants of Christ, ministers of the gospel, and not lords over God's heritage, his believers (1 Pe 5:3). Through its call the church in Christian liberty designates the place, form and scope of service. We believe that when the church calls men into this public ministry, it is the Lord himself acting through the church (Ac 20:28).

The position of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod on the doctrines of Scripture is clear. From Luther's writings, the Lutheran Confessions and our own doctrinal statements we can testify that Scripture is our source and norm for doctrine and practice. We consequently reject anything that falls short of this position.

By the grace of God we can also say that our practice in pastoral counseling and psychology agrees with our doctrinal position. As we proceed in this thesis, it will be our intent to see how that agreement can be maintained and encouraged among us.

CHAPTER 5

THE DEFINITION OF SOURCE AND NORM AS APPLIED TO DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

Now that we have considered some of the important references to holy Scriptures as source and norm for doctrine and practice, we should be able to establish a reasonable and workable definition of what it means to have Scripture as our source and norm. The word doctrine refers to everything we teach. The word practice is added to our considerations because we must also do what we teach.

During the synodical controversies of the late 50s and early 60s our synod made bold and accurate statements about the importance of Scripture. Liberal Lutheran theology questioned whether Scripture is inerrant and verbally inspired. This raised doubt about whether Scripture is a suitable source and norm for doctrine and practice. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod contended that it is, it always was and it always will be the source and norm for doctrine and practice. Within the framework of these events a discussion of doctrine alone clearly was insufficient. Practice must also be a consideration because what we do is just as important as what we teach.

God made use of a sad and difficult situation to call both doctrine and practice to our attention. Through it he gave many people the blessing of knowing where we can find him and all he wants us to know. Those who choose to acknowledge this blessing find a comfort and assurance that nothing else can replace. Those who choose to ignore it are left to find hope where there is nothing but hopelessness, and sense where there is nothing but confusion.

This is a lesson we don't want to forget as we establish our definition for source and norm. We seek a definition that is both doctrinally correct as well as usable for our practice as faithful Lutheran pastors.

SOURCE FOR DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

A source is a thing or place from which something is drawn. A well, for example, is a source for water, oil or some other liquid. Obviously the well must contain what you are seeking, and you must be seeking what is in it. A dry well will not provide water, and a person who doesn't need water won't go to the well even if there is water in it.

We are in need of a source for our doctrine and practice. (The diversity of philosophies in our world proves how great that need is.) The inability to answer the age-old questions of origin, existence and destiny proves the need we have for a source for doctrine and practice. What are we to teach, and what are we to do?

The Scripture testifies to our need. Solomon's Ecclesiastes (to say nothing of the rest of Scripture) testifies that without God all is vanity. The best human beings can produce by themselves is a big zero. Scripture consistently points us to our own helplessness and hopelessness. We cannot make any sense out of life without God. Scripture rules out everything as a source for our doctrine and practice until we are left with holy Scripture alone as the only valid choice.

Scripture is a well, supplied with all that we need for doctrine and practice. As we have seen, God always pointed his people and all

people to his Word to guide what they taught and did. He filled the Scriptures with examples of the curse mankind brings on itself by choosing any other way of life than the one he directs. He also gives abundant examples of the the blessings he gives when people follow his ways. We always know God and his ways correctly when we listen to him speak in his Word.

In all this God points us outside of ourselves to find our source for doctrine and practice. In the time of the judges every man did that which was right in his own eyes. That humanistic anarchy accounted for the confusion and eventual destruction of the nation that had been chosen to bring the Savior into the world. The thinking, subjective and shallow, was limited to what was in the hearts and minds of the people themselves. Solomon correctly judged all this kind of thinking to be vanity. The same judgment applies whenever people are at the center of their own teaching and practice, doing what is right in their own eyes. That road will always be a confusing road to their own destruction.

Scripture offers two basic doctrines, law and gospel. The law will serve to show us what we are as it mirrors our total depravity. This sad truth that Scripture presents is one reason why we must have a source for doctrine and practice. The only doctrine and practice we can expect to find within ourselves is sinful doctrine and practice. Nothing good will ever come from it. Our nature is so corrupted with sin that we cannot even hope to know the full impact of our own sinfulness without being told about it. Any human doctrine and practice will seek to hide that fact rather than to present it clearly.

By way of illustration, I will relate one counseling situation. I talked with a young girl who had an abortion. The staff of the abortion clinic had told her that her subsequent depression was natural,

that it was physical, that it would eventually go away. But the depression didn't go away soon enough to suit her. She told me she felt that she was guilty of murder. When I told her she was guilty of murder, she was finally able to confront her sin and learn a new lesson about God's forgiveness. Everything she had been told up to that time had kept her from facing the full impact of her own sinfulness. Obviously, the counsel she had received kept her from recognizing her sinfulness and Christ's forgiveness.

The opposite is also true. Without the Scripture to mirror sin, a person can become a self-made Pharisee justifying his own righteousness. Without a source for recognizing his own sinfulness, he can ignore his own needs, as well as his sins of omission and commission. He can be satisfied with himself. Just as it was with the Pharisees of Jesus' day, a person can run from any confrontation with his own sinfulness. The admission of only one act of guilt destroys a person's entire hope in himself. No wonder our own people will also try to make the same escape. All people, Christian or not, are made of the same sinful flesh and have the same sinful nature.

Scripture confronts both the one who sins ignorantly and the self-righteous sinner. Scriptures also deal with those who try to walk the middle road hoping that enough good can make up for whatever evil has been done. Scripture places everyone under the same requirement of perfection and pronounces the same guilty verdict on every human being.

The law also serves as a curb to check the coarse outbursts of sin in the world. St. Paul reminds us in Romans 7:7 that if the law had not told us what sin is, we wouldn't even know sin when we see it. There is nothing in the world that God created perfect that Satan has not found a way to pervert and corrupt. This includes the knowledge of

sin. Even though the same law recorded in God's Word was written in the hearts of all men at creation, sin clouded it and corrupted it. We can no longer depend on the natural law to be an accurate source and norm. The proverb says that every social sin begins with a plea for toleration. In other terms, when you sin you run the risk of getting used to sinning. When a conscience, personal or social, is struck down often enough, eventually it doesn't work anymore. We need the law as a curb to check the outbursts of what we already know to be wrong. We simply refuse to listen, reaching the point that we can't hear conscience speak any longer.

Satan not only leads people into sin, he remains the great accuser of mankind. He is always ready to accuse us of our guilt. He promotes hopelessness and despair when we finally realize the guilt of sins we have actually committed. He is the accuser in spite of the fact that he is the one who leads people into sin in the first place. On the other hand, Satan also accuses people of sin even when their actions were not contrary to God's law. He leaves people in a state of helpless guilt even when God's law doesn't say the action is sinful. For example, many people have experienced guilt over their own sexuality. Satan can pervert this gift of God leading to sinful thoughts, words and actions. He can also pervert it by declaring an act wrong when God says it is right.

The law remains the only unchanging source for the accurate knowledge and condemnation of sin. The law also serves as a guide for our Christian lives, but we cannot properly apply this third use of the law until we properly understand the other great doctrine of Scripture, the gospel.

The gospel is the good news that God has declared the world

righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ and that by God's grace in Jesus Christ we have been freed from sin through faith. This central doctrine of Scripture is totally without parallel in human thought. As we have seen, to humans it is inconceivable to the point of absurdity.

As a source for doctrine and practice, the gospel begins with a body of facts. It is not only the record of God's words of love, but the history of God's acts of love. His plan of salvation from eternity was an act of love. His desire for mankind's salvation, shown first to the world in Genesis 3:15, is an act of love. Beyond words of love, his promises of salvation in Christ constituted God's acts to save mankind by revealing both his desire and his plan.

The history of God's love culminates, of course, in the acts of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world. The birth, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are historical facts. Any adequate definition of the holy Scriptures as the source for doctrine and practice must clearly demonstrate that the gospel is more than just words of love. It is an accurate historical record of God's acts of love.

The gospel settles the question of how God's justice and mercy can both be satisfied at the same time. The key to these diametrically opposed principles is Jesus Christ. At one and the same time, Christ satisfied God's justice and proved that God is merciful. God's declaration of universal justification was both a just and merciful declaration. It is just because all sin was paid for in full. It is merciful because man didn't make the payment. The central truth of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, God mercifully satisfied his own just demands. Our definition of the holy Scriptures as source must include the statement of this central article of justification by grace through faith in

Jesus Christ.

When sinners are brought by God into a confrontation with themselves and their own sinfulness, they either acknowledge that God is right or deny it. Scripture calls the acknowledgment of sin with corresponding faith in Jesus Christ μετάνοια. Only God can accomplish repentance because of the blind, dead enmity of sinners. God produces a conversion, a new birth, an enlightening in an otherwise blind, dead enemy. God changes the sinner's mind. All this is done through the vehicle of the gospel in Word and sacraments. That was God's choice. He bound himself to his Word and that enables us to realize that he was seeking us all along. He declared us righteous for Jesus' sake. He declared that we are acceptable to him.

When God changes a sinner's mind through the gospel there is a corresponding change of mind about the law. In the law, God provides proper direction for our thankfulness. This third use of the law works because God is at work in us. Obedience is not a welling of our internal emotions, it is a control the Holy Spirit exercises. The love Christ had for us and the responsive love we have for him constrains us to obey. The Scriptures remain the source of our thanksgiving, not only by motivating thankfulness, but by directing it as well.

With all of these things in mind I will submit a definition of the holy Scriptures as the source for doctrine and practice.

HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE SOURCE OF ALL CORRECT TEACHING ABOUT OUR OWN SINFULNESS AND GOD'S MERCIFUL ACT TO JUSTIFY US FOR JESUS' SAKE SO THAT WE LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

This definition reflects the relationship between a person and his God. That relationship deeply influences many of the situations that require counseling. The definition states that for us as pastors, the individual's relationship with God is of primary importance. All

other problems will be handled in that light. In Chapter Eleven we will address in more detail how this can be done.

NORM FOR DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

We have already submitted a general definition for the word norm. A norm is a standard by which things are measured. The origin of the word refers to a carpenter's square. The example of a common ruler might serve just as well. A ruler can be used to produce a straight line. It can also be measured into segments to determine distances along that straight line. In both cases the ruler is a standard. All of us depend on rulers regularly for one or both reasons.

The Word of God is the standard for laying out and measuring our doctrine and practice. Following this procedure reflects our ministerial approach to Scripture. When a pastor writes a sermon he is, in a sense, laying his words next to the Word of God to see whether his words conform to what the Bible teaches. If his words don't agree in all points, he must structure his statements so they do follow the straight line Scripture's clear teachings produce.

The same pastor must also measure the distances the Word of God dictates. Has he gone as far as he should representing the whole counsel of God? Has he spoken more law than he should have or less? Has he spoken the gospel clearly to settle troubled consciences with God's forgiveness in Christ? Has he used the law to do the gospel's work or the gospel to do the law's? Has he properly distinguished between the two? The subjects and applications may differ greatly but the standard for direction and measurement is always the same.

In preaching, the normative use of Scripture comes almost automatically after some experience. When writing, we have the time to consider what we will say before we say it. We take the time to examine what we have said to see whether it could be misunderstood. In counseling, time to make such examinations may not exist. If a person calls for an appointment or comes without notice, a pastor may not even know what the problem is beforehand. He must be thinking in terms of sin and grace, law and gospel. That mindset will establish the direction for everything that follows. His norm is not just the Bible in general terms but the whole counsel of God, the analogy of faith, law and gospel, sin and grace, and the historical acts of God's love in particular. When the pastor remains a pastor and does not attempt to be an amateur psychologist, he can begin to apply the specifics after he has had opportunity to hear and evaluate the problem. Both the pastor and his member will know, however, that they are together in the counseling session to find out what a holy and gracious God has to say to a troubled sinner.

First we must consider the place and use of the law. The law places the responsibility for sin squarely on the sinner. People may tend to forget that fact more than any other. Many pastors may forget to look for indications that their troubled members are not facing their own responsibility for sin. That problem is easy to overcome. All the pastor needs to remember and convey is that he is not only dealing with a depressed or anxious or stressed or alcoholic or neurotic or psychotic person, he is always dealing with a sinner. Whether a particular act has been sinful or whether no obvious sinful act has been committed, the troubled person is still sinful by nature. We can only judge sinful words and acts, we cannot read hearts. We have no excuse to ignore the

nature of a person. None of these conditions or any others eliminate the fact of sinful human nature and responsibility for unacceptable behavior. The Bible places all people squarely under the condemnation of the law. Modern psychology and medicine with their humanistic approach have virtually eliminated responsibility for sin by calling sin an illness. Nevertheless, sin never stops being sin, and sinners on earth do not stop being sinners even when they are sick.

Much of the time a pastor spends counseling is done with victims of various circumstances. When a divorce is impending, it is not unusual to speak only to one of the parties involved. The effort spent on recording the wrongs of the spouse is fruitless and can easily produce self-righteousness in the "innocent" party. While we can be sympathetic to the problems of a person who may not have wanted a divorce in the first place, that person is still a sinner with emotions that are inclined in a sinful direction. Those emotions and needs must be addressed.

When the family of an alcoholic comes for help, the session can easily deteriorate into a record of alcohol-induced behaviors. The alcoholic may not be present at that point because he is still denying his alcoholism. The family wants to know what can be done to help him stop. Sympathy or empathy for the people dealing with the alcoholic are natural emotions for pastors to experience. So is the pastor's own disgust at the problem of alcoholism and what it is doing to the family. Reality demands that these people soon stop talking about all the problems the alcoholic has so they can come to the realization that if their loved one is to be helped they must learn to show love in a different way than they have been showing it in the past. They must learn that love will not cover up the drinking problem. Love will

confront the problem. That kind of love is difficult to show. The risks of raising anger and hostility are high, but that is a price love is willing to pay.

All pastors who make hospital visits have had the difficult responsibility of ministering to a terminal patient and his or her family. Although a person may be terminally ill, he has not stopped being a sinner. Quite often sinful pride shows itself when the question is asked, "Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this?" Self-righteousness must be addressed wherever it is found whether it is in a healthy person or a very ill one.

Pastors with any amount of experience know how often secular counselors ignore responsibility for actions. When it is necessary to call in the aid of the professional counseling community, we can often find that they are going in exactly the opposite direction from the Word of God. To illustrate: alcoholism is considered a disease. More recently it has been called the disease of denial - a much more realistic definition. The tendency still remains, however, to say, "They have an illness, and you must understand that." Perhaps they do. Perhaps there is medical assistance that can be offered. But alcoholics are still sinners who drink too much. No one is holding a gun to their heads. They are holding the gun to their own heads and that is suicide if the "illness" results in their death. We may be tempted to excuse ourselves from our pastoral responsibilities because illness instead of sin is the explanation for the alcoholic's behavior.

On one occasion, for example, alcoholism and a number of other problems kept a member from regular church attendance. The problem continued to the point that church discipline approached the final steps of Matthew 18. When the individual received a letter stating that the

unrepented sin could place him outside the fellowship of the Holy Christian Church, he interpreted that statement to mean that the church no longer wanted him and he would be removed from church membership. A friend of the individual contacted the church to discourage any such action. He was surprised that the man's church was not more willing to help the man. When he learned that the church had tried for years to help the man and that the help was refused, little was done to change his opinion. At that point the pastor had the opportunity to speak of one of the ten laws of Alcoholics Anonymous, namely the willingness to submit to a being higher than himself. The friend was told that it was the work of the church to help others understand who that higher being is and what he has done for us and all people. He understood that the alcoholic was depriving himself of some of the most effective help available. As a result he convinced his friend to return to his church which he found to be a fellowship that had no desire to lose him but had a very strong desire to help him both in his relationship with God and the control of his alcoholism. The friend who had called on his behalf found the same thing for himself. In such a case, neither the church alone nor Alcoholics Anonymous alone could meet the alcoholic's problem alone. Both the church and Alcoholics Anonymous could cooperate to meet those needs. It is a blessing to be able to cooperate in such a way.

The example of an alcoholic may be obvious. Many pastors have dealt with the problem and understand it. Our association with a person whose mental behavior is schizophrenic and needs hospital care may not be quite as frequent. Dealing with a person whose thinking has split off from reality, who is hallucinating, who thinks he or she is the only one in the world whose thinking is correct, can be frightening for everyone concerned. Again we might be tempted to let the professional

community handle the problem alone. Medical assistance will probably be the route the hospital will follow. The use of psychotropic medication, that is, medication to alter or control psychotic behavior will probably require at least minimal hospitalization. In the setting of the hospital, psychotherapy may or may not be part of the treatment. Establishing the proper drugs to use and their proper dosages is probably the primary reason for hospitalization. That, of course, is territory where we are not competent to act; we need the assistance psychiatrists are able to give. Still, mental illness professionals are at odds over whether behavior causes organic changes or organic changes cause improper behavior. Perhaps both are true. Perhaps the problem is completely organic and can only be controlled with medication. The individual, however, is still a sinner ultimately responsible for his or her own behavior. The illness is not an excuse for inappropriate behavior; it is evidence of a spiritual as well as a mental problem. The law of God still speaks of those responsibilities. No therapy is really a healing process without the proper application of the law. The only variable is the degree of responsibility for behavior in the patient who is mentally ill. Perhaps that judgment must be left completely in God's hands at times.

Responsibility for sin is only one example of the confusion that exists when there is an attempt to integrate humanistic psychology with biblical Christianity. The confusion clearly illustrates the contradiction at the heart of the issue. The resulting problem for us is that we may too readily accede to the professional community because we think the problems we face are beyond the scope of our ministry.

While a clinical understanding of various psychological problems may be beyond our understanding, we cannot ignore our responsibility to

continue to apply both law and gospel in their proper order. Doing that may put us into direct conflict with other helping professionals. We need the confidence, the competence and the courage to maintain our position. We need the cooperation of helping agencies that will allow us to cooperate with them. Many will make such allowances because they have found that competent cooperation with concerned pastors is profitable to promote genuine healing.

The law is only one part of our work as Christian counselors. The law prepares the heart for the Holy Ghost to work also through the gospel to heal the sinner. If the law has not been applied, there will be no consequent need for the gospel. A person who has not faced his own responsibility for sin will try to change any of the circumstances around himself before he will change himself. Scripturally speaking, this comes very close to a refusal to repent. Psychologically speaking, no therapeutic improvement can be expected. Someone asked, "How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?" The answer is that it only takes one, but the light bulb really has to want to change. Frivolity aside, change in behavior to a psychologist has many similarities with repentance to a theologian. Where unwillingness to change exists, no change of mind or heart will occur.

In many cases even non-Christian counseling does produce an improvement of sorts. Even if the law and gospel are never mentioned, people sometimes get better. Alcoholics do sometimes stop drinking altogether. Depressed people do come out of their depressions. Anxious people do get over their anxieties. The list could go on and on. At the same time, however, statistics also show that the problems often reoccur. Non-Christian counseling does have its success rate. Any and all of these treatments deal specifically with the problem presented by

the people who come for help. To secular counselors, the ways and means to success are not as important as successfully reaching the goal of improved behavior. In other words, people who come for help will find help no matter what works. We might go so far as to say that some forms of therapy work only because the troubled people want them to work.

To illustrate the point that non-Christian agencies do have success statistics to report, we might take the example of alcoholism. Over the years Alcoholics Anonymous has recognized certain traits in the people they help. Such things as perpetual lying, denial of the problem, covering up evidence of drinking, blaming other people, pressures or situations almost always present themselves in alcoholics. Alcohol treatment programs recognize these characteristics. All of these and more have been categorized. All of them are evident to some degree when a person comes for help in his battle against alcoholism. Part of the help available to recovering alcoholics is simply a forced recognition of the problem. This is an educational process and nothing more. In addition, the people in the family of the alcoholic can be educated to recognize the indications of alcoholism. Where it is appropriate they, too, can be strengthened in their determination to do battle against the unacceptable behavior. They can also be taught to recognize that they may have been aiding the alcoholic to hide his problem. People can learn all of these patterns and behaviors and change them with some form of education and support. All of their work can be done with or without a Christian setting. All this notwithstanding, most alcohol treatment programs require that the alcoholic himself makes the initial contact. These agencies realize that they cannot help people who do not want their help.

The same kinds of examples are evident in depression, anxiety and

stress. People can learn what depression is, what causes it, what simple things can be changed to control it. Calming exercises may be very helpful to people under stress. Facing and dealing with fears may aid an anxious person in controlling his or her anxieties. Our people are living in an age when the general public has a sophisticated awareness of emotional problems and their treatment. Most of the treatments available to the public have little if anything to do with a person's relationship with God. In the final analysis, the person may find relief for his symptoms and consider that relief to be a cure. He can complete his therapy with the belief that he has ultimately cured himself. But what about his relationship with God?

Something is missing if a person is treated within some clinical setting for his emotional problems. The Word of God is missing. On the other hand, something is missing if we make the attempt to treat these things as only spiritual problems. Concern for specific needs and problems, which may be organic to some extent, is missing. Our people do not usually expect us to know much about emotional problems or substance abuse. Pastors, however, often know much more about those problems than their people might think. The important message for us to convey is not only that we know something about them, but that we also care about the problems and the people who have them. What we have to say does have a direct relationship with the form of therapy the person might choose. In addition, the Word of God has something to say to our people that they need to hear. Speaking to the problems of our people without an understanding of the problems is what our people call being "preachy." Speaking to those problems without the Word of God is what God calls unfaithful.

"Success" has caused many, both pastors and members, to seek

assistance from materials, agencies and other professionals in doing counseling. The goal is for the troubled person to get better. That would seem to be a noble and desirable goal to have. But if getting better is the goal, what is the norm? What does it mean to get better? What happens to a person's eternal relationship with God? Has this professional, this material, this agency given something God couldn't give? By no means! The person who is content with such a goal has become satisfied with a lesser norm and goal than the Word of God sets. He just wanted to get better. He doesn't particularly want to be closer to God. He has already reached the goal he set for himself.

To know one's own sinfulness and God's answer to it is what it means to get better, according to God's definition. Sin is at the root of every problem we face in life. That sin must be confronted with the law so it can be healed by the gospel. Both are essential. The goal is eternal peace with God.

Once people have confronted their own sinfulness they can be led on a spiritual trip to Calvary to see what happened to that sin. At this point most Christian psychologists fail. God's record of atonement and redemption is an historical record of the acts of God in Jesus Christ. His life, death and resurrection are the reasons why God reconciled the world to himself justly and mercifully in the same act.

All people have the built-in realization that sin must be paid for. To say we have been forgiven is not enough. We need to understand why we have been forgiven and how we have been forgiven. We need to see sin being paid for by our Substitute, Jesus Christ. Forgiveness without the payment of Jesus Christ is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace" in his book The Cost of Discipleship.¹ Forgiveness without

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, (New York: Macmillan, 1976), pages 45ff.

atonement leaves a person with a god who tolerates sin or changed his mind about sin. Forgiveness without atonement leaves a person under the law and without appreciation for the gospel.

The problem of self-worth is a good example of the way humanistic psychology and Christian counseling handle the application of the gospel. The presenting problem, that is the problem that caused the troubled person to come for help, is that a person feels worthless because he has lost his job in a layoff at work. Once a counselor has come to that understanding, the normal process is to convince the person that he really is worth something after all. Most Christian counselors will remind the person that he is good because he was made in the image of God. He is God's creation. Most do not address the fact that the image of God means the perfect righteousness Adam had in the Garden of Eden. Most do not acknowledge that mankind lost the image of God when Adam and Eve sinned. Counselors like Dobson more frequently emphasize that each human being came from the creating hand of God who does all things well. God certainly does all things well, but man doesn't. We cannot ignore that fact. Nevertheless, most Christian counselors will go on with that discussion until the client forsakes his feeling of worthlessness. He stops on the way home to buy a plaque in a Christian bookstore that says, "I'm me and I'm good 'cuz God don't make junk." For a while everything is fine. But does this process deserve the name Christian? Hardly! Not once was Christ's name, much less his work, even mentioned. No solid evidence has been presented that this sad person is truly valuable. More than likely he will return to his counselor for a refresher course on value that still lacks a lesson in Christ's redemptive work.

Man was made in the image of God. We lost that image when our

first parents sinned. We are God's creation. So are houseflies. God's creating act is not enough to establish our value before God and man. A person who feels worthless will not find comfort in the fact that he is God's creation because he is still a sinner. If he feels worthless because he has been laid off from work he may need to evaluate whether he might have made a god out of his job or the money it brought him. Does he feel worthless because his "god" is gone? Once he has confronted that secret idolatry that he didn't realize existed, he can be shown with a presentation of the gospel what does establish his worth. He is worth the life of the Son of God himself. That sin has been paid for once and for all. The Holy Spirit will bring his false ideas about his own worth into harmony with the truth of Scripture. The person suffering from the problem of feeling worthless has the unchanging norm of God's Word available to deal with those feelings. More than that, the counselor has the power of the Holy Spirit to do all the work.

We must apply both law and gospel, sin and grace in our pastoral psychology and counseling as automatically as we do in our pulpits. We must start with the realization that we are always dealing with a sinner who is somehow in doubt about his or her relationship with God. That doubt can cause minor problems or major ones. The doubt may be magnified by a serious mental or physical illness. The person may require more help than we are able to give without professional assistance, but the same person will always need our help. For that reason I would submit the following definition for the norm of our practice in pastoral psychology.

HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE STANDARD BY WHICH ALL EFFORTS MUST BE JUDGED WHICH ADDRESS OUR SINFULNESS AND A PEACEFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OURSELVES AND OTHERS SO THAT WE LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL.

In Chapter Eleven we will consider some of the ways judgments can be made concerning various efforts in pastoral counseling and psychology. These evaluations are necessary not only for pastors who do this kind of work, but also for our people who have a vast storehouse of material available to them to address their needs. They too must be equipped to judge whether a particular idea is in agreement with the central message and purpose of Scripture. With the definition we are using we will be less likely to lose sight of our relationship with God as we deal with people who desire to feel better. We will also do a better job with our relationships with the people who need our help.

CHAPTER 6

SCRIPTURE AS SOURCE AND NORM IN PRACTICE OF PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Our study of Scripture has led us to the definitions for source and norm stated in the previous chapter. In this chapter we will apply these definitions specifically to pastoral counseling and psychology.

The definitions we have established are:

- (1) HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE SOURCE OF ALL CORRECT TEACHING ABOUT OUR SINFULNESS AND GOD'S MERCIFUL ACT TO JUSTIFY US FOR JESUS' SAKE SO THAT WE LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.
- (2) HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE STANDARD BY WHICH ALL EFFORTS MUST BE JUDGED WHICH ADDRESS OUR SINFULNESS AND A PEACEFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OURSELVES AND OTHERS SO THAT WE LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

The first definition applies to Scripture as source, the second to Scripture as norm.

Scripture originates all true teaching about God, ourselves and our relationship with him. Scripture also establishes what that relationship should be. We have been justified and sanctified by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. God has declared us righteous and he has brought us to a saving faith in him by the work of the Holy Ghost through the Word.

In this chapter we intend to establish that the ultimate purpose of pastoral counseling and psychology is to aid people in living according to God's revealed will, in harmony with God, themselves and others. This peaceful relationship according to God's will is by no means the universal goal and purpose of all pastoral counselors and psychologists. (Later chapters will make this fact more evident.) More importantly, this peaceful relationship is not always the goal our own

members seek when they come to us for pastoral counseling. They come because they have a problem. For example, they already know about God's forgiveness, but are still troubled with guilt. They wonder what God has to say about their marriage relationship. They wonder why they experience stress even when they know God is in complete control in their lives.

Some questions members often ask are, how do I find relief from stress? How can my marriage relationship improve? How can I communicate better with my spouse or my children? How do I deal with a mentally ill family member? Why am I so anxious? How do I deal with my grief? How can I gain more self-esteem? Our members may only desire to answer these questions. The questions are the only reason to seek pastoral counsel. They may assume everything is fine in their relationship with God, but something is wrong with their life.

Our people are living in a materialistic and humanistic environment as much as we are. The influences of humanism and materialism deeply affect them whether they realize it or not. All Christians can lose sight of their heavenly goal. When that happens sources for help and standards for true happiness change as well. The perspective changes dramatically when we are only concerned about how we feel today and not about the eternal plan and purpose God has for us. The concluding verses of Romans 8 show us that fact clearly. St. Paul says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rm 8:28). This passage has given comfort to thousands of Christians. We can easily forget, however, that St. Paul did not simply expect us to believe that because he said it under the inspiration of God. He based the entire hope the passage gives on the way God faithfully carried out his plan and work in

Jesus Christ from eternity. That is the perspective we need in our pastoral counseling.

Pastors can also neglect the eternal perspective God's Word gives to daily problems and solutions. If relief right now is what our people are seeking, we can be satisfied to give the people what they want and nothing more. But does that mean we will also give our people what they need? This chapter is included to remind us of what we and our people need. That way we can do a better job of teaching our people to want what God supplies and to be satisfied with nothing less.

SOURCE FOR PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Our definition for Scripture as source is:

HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE SOURCE OF ALL CORRECT TEACHING ABOUT OUR SINFULNESS AND GOD'S MERCIFUL ACT TO JUSTIFY US FOR JESUS' SAKE SO THAT WE LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

Here we are primarily concerned with what Scripture means by God's will and living according to it. St. Paul states God's will simply when he says he "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4). Luther expands St. Paul's thought in his Small Catechism by including both God's positive and negative will. Positively, God wills that we live victorious lives in Christ. Negatively, God's will includes the defeat of sin and its temptations with the strength God provides.

God's will is done when he breaks and defeats every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world and our sinful flesh, which try to prevent us from keeping God's name holy and letting his kingdom come. And God's will is done when he strengthens and keeps us firm in his Word and in the faith as long as we live. This is his good and gracious will.¹

1. David P. Kuske, Luther's Catechism, Milwaukee, Wis.: Board for Parish Education, 1982, page 304.

Luther's explanation to the Third Petition clearly acknowledges the source of the problems people have as they try to live according to God's will. The problem lies with Satan, with mankind itself and with the world that is the abode for mankind. The common malady is sin. Living according to God's will, then, means living in victory over sin. We can expect no victory over sin when no war is waged against it.

The starting point for repentance is an admission of sin that comes from a confrontation with the law. This starting point is obvious, but it is also easy to ignore. Sin seems to escape consideration when a person in the pastor's office is deeply upset, perhaps in tears. Sympathy is the natural response to that condition. But sympathy does not exclude the confrontation of sin. Sympathetic Christian love cares enough to look for the root problem and to apply the best medicine available. If a person has no peace, something is wrong with that person's relationship with God. Sin must be at work somehow and somewhere.

Organic problems such as hormone imbalances, high blood pressure, improper salt and sugar tolerances and the like all need the attention of a medical doctor when they appear to have some effect on a troubled person. A pastor would do well to suggest medical evaluation when it seems appropriate. Problems like these are easy for a medical doctor to detect. Once that has been done, the starting point for counseling must be to define the sin causing the disturbance so it can be confessed.

Depression and anxiety provide good examples of the point we are making. Organic problems can cause depression and anxiety. These organic disturbances, if they exist, can be controlled to some extent with appropriate medication prescribed by a medical doctor or psychiatrist. If such organic disturbances are controlled as much as possible

or ruled out as causes, we must look for something else causing the problem.

Depression has been described as anger turned inward. Most counseling and psychology books provide lists of things that can cause depression. Depression usually involves some kind of loss. Loss of health, a spouse, a child, a job or an object of security can all cause depression. One writer says, "Depression is an illness and not a necessary part of healthy living. What's more important - you can overcome it by learning some simple methods for mood elevation." The writer goes on to describe some of these simple methods for mood elevation and how they work. That leaves the troubled person with his \$13.00 book and the idea that he simply needs to learn how to cope with his problem by himself. Then everything will be fine. Both the problem and the solution are centered completely in the person who is troubled with depression. Who needs God? Who needs an eternal perspective on his life? How much better will the depressed person get?

We can see the same kind of situation from God's point of view. St. Paul had good reason to be depressed at the time he wrote his letter to the Philippians. He did not have the freedom to do the work he loved to do as a servant of God. But Paul was not depressed. In fact, the epistle he wrote to the Philippians is his epistle of joy. He was not depressed because he did not consider his imprisonment a loss. He was not doing things the way he might have wanted to do them. He might not have been in the place he wanted to be. He was, however, where God wanted him to be. He did not place his will above God's. Rather, St. Paul was subject to God and consequently he could find joy in any situation God allowed him to face. While he freely expressed his own

will, St. Paul submitted to God's will so the two were in harmony. He was ready to wait and see what God wanted to do with him and what God wanted was fine.

This kind of submission to God's will is altogether different from learning a few techniques for mood elevation. Sin is involved when depression results from placing ones' own will above God's. Pastors frequently deal, for example, with people who want to have children but remain childless. Obviously, God did not want the couple to have children at that point. The reason for that decision is God's, not the couple's. Many pastors have probably counseled people who are depressed because of that situation. In the final analysis the couple is saying, "We won't be happy until God gives us what we want." The fact is that human beings have no right to dictate to God that way. God is not bound to submit to human will, we are bound to submit to his. When we do, no reason for depression exists. When we do not, no cure for depression can work.

The prophet Elijah is a different example of a depressed person. His situation also brings out another aspect of depression - loneliness. After his encounter with the prophets of Baal, Scripture shows the prophet in a classic state of depression. He was angry because he couldn't do anything to change the idolatrous state of the nation of Israel. He was sure that he was the last believer on earth. He was practically suicidal. He wouldn't eat and he wanted to die. His sin was trusting himself more than he trusted God. In his depressed loneliness he was sure that God could not do what he couldn't do himself. But God would not allow the self-pity to continue. Elijah ate food God provided for him and commanded him to eat, then God put him to work. In more modern terms, God took care of the organic problem and the emo-

tional problem. The work Elijah did forced the prophet to recognize that God still controlled the heathen nations around Israel, that he was still in control of Israel itself, and that God was still in control of the proclamation of the Word in and from Israel. Elijah was not alone in the world or in his work. Elijah was not responsible for controlling the world, not even his own little, lonely world. God was controlling everything including Elijah's lonely little corner of the world.

When one of our members experiences a significant loss, perhaps the loss of a spouse, depression is a natural reaction. It is part of the grieving process human beings experience. Husband and wife are one flesh. God planned marriage that way. When a member loses a spouse, he or she has lost part of himself or herself. Much the same thing can be said about any family member. We almost expect to see a person in a state of depression with its associated loneliness. The grieving person might not eat for a long period of time. He or she may go sleepless for days at a time. When that has occurred, organic problems may very well be involved in the depression that need a medical doctor's attention. At some point, however, the matter of a secret idolatry may be addressed of necessity. Jesus warned against the dangers of loving father or mother, son or daughter more than him (Mt 10:37). Only when a person confronts the sin of loving a person more than God, will he or she understand the full glory and blessing of forgiveness and life that only God can give. Rather than learning techniques for mood elevation, we can learn what it means to live in the faith that what God does is always done right.

What we have said about depression can also be said of stress and anxiety. These common and dangerous emotions come from the vast number of things that we cannot control in our own lives. We cannot control

what other people will say or do. We cannot control the amount of time available to do a project. We cannot make other people like us. We cannot get well as fast as we would like when we are sick. We cannot make the money go as far as we would like. We cannot control the economy. All of these things and dozens more can cause stress for people.

The most common solution to the problem of stress is to teach people what is causing their own personal stress and convince them that they must merely accept the fact that these are things they cannot change. Some of these techniques work for awhile. Some work simply because people feel that they are doing something about their problem. That amounts to learning how to do something about things you can't control. It is a paradox. In most cases, the relief from stress is temporary at best.

From a more spiritual point of view, the sins involved in anxiety and stress are much the same as those involved with depressions. St. Peter says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." This passage alone should be the end of all stress and anxiety. It not only tells us that God cares about us. The passage states that God, the all-knowing and almighty does all our caring so that we don't need to worry. He is our "substitute worrier." Stress occurs when we or our people refuse to let God do the caring that he alone is qualified to do. Nothing is beyond his control. Nothing is beyond his wisdom and knowledge. When we do the worrying instead of God, we might as well say that we don't think he is qualified to control our lives properly. Do we trust ourselves to do God's work better than he can? How difficult that is to see sometimes!

God has ways of letting people know that they do not qualify to

do his work as God. Job certainly learned that. After presenting his own imagined righteousness to God he had to put his hand over his mouth and admit that God knew more about running the world and his life than he did. St. Paul also came to that same realization. As a minister of Christ he needed to know that heaven made all his work and suffering worthwhile. God gave him a glimpse of heaven so Paul could see what was ahead for him and those who believed his saving message. On the other hand, as a human being, St. Paul needed the humility to know that he was just a man whose whole strength and effectiveness came from God. The Lord provided St. Paul with just such a reminder. St. Paul experienced a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan that God permitted him to endure. The suffering he endured because of that thorn in the flesh was a constant reminder that he was just a man. He had limitations and weaknesses because he was a man. He was not God and he could not do God's work.

Stress takes a serious toll. Stress can cause high blood pressure, gastrointestinal disorders, asthma, heart diseases and many other serious illnesses. Stress and anxiety can seriously shorten life. Stress and anxiety can kill. Heart attacks and strokes frequently relate directly with stress. We cannot make life less stressful. We cannot give people control over things that God holds in his own hands alone. We can learn important lessons about his love and power. God has certainly earned our trust, in fact, he created it. We can present people with the fact that it is a sin to try to control what God has reserved for himself. We can reassure the repentant sinner of God's forgiveness that takes the load of guilt and the load of worry off of us so he can carry it for us.

At times we may witness stress that comes from a desire to pay

for sin with one's own suffering. Stress, for example, may come from an attempt to measure up to someone else's expectations. Children often grow up believing that they are constantly failing to meet the expectations of their parents even when their parents don't consider their children to be failures at all. If nothing is done to recognize the problem and correct it, the implications could be serious. If people believe they are failures, they probably believe their failures should be punished. If no one punishes the failures, they punish themselves. People punish themselves for their failures or their guilt in exactly the same ways people under stress react to situations beyond their control. Many of the same physical afflictions stressed people suffer can be traced to attempts to pay for guilt that is real or imagined. Some people commit suicide in an attempt to pay for their own guilt. Isn't that what Judas tried to do when he killed himself because he couldn't undo what he had done to the Savior? The payment Judas made for his sin was insufficient. So is the payment anyone tries make for sin this side of hell.

The secular counselor can only look at superficial problems and relatively shallow underlying problems. He concentrates on relieving the suffering his client faces. Our work as pastoral counselors goes farther. We must also recognize symptoms. We may also look for underlying problems. But our ultimate purpose is to see when a member attempts to control something God has reserved for himself or when a member attempts to pay for a sin that only Jesus could forgive. That relationship with God doesn't matter to secular counselors and psychologists who cannot look at a human being from God's point of view. We not only can look at ourselves and the people we serve from God's point of view, we are committed to that perspective because the Word of God is

our source and authority.

The beginning of repentance is the confession of sin. Our work is to make the awareness of sin clear in preparation for a presentation of the gospel. Human beings have been universally inclined to avoid confrontation with sin since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. How often hasn't a pastor listened patiently to a member tell him all the things that are wrong with the spouse? Is that person confronting his or her own sin? Hardly! Sometimes the list of the spouse's sins are real and seriously damaging to the marriage. Sometimes they sound like an accumulation of trivia. The real question is, what about the responsibilities of the person in the office? Is he or she covering personal guilt with self-righteousness?

We all speak much more easily about the sins of others instead of confessing our own sins. We, as pastors, can only speak to people who allow us to talk to them. If a spouse is not in the office, we cannot speak to him or her at that particular time. We can only speak to the one who is present. We must address whatever guilt presents itself. We can only assure people of forgiveness for the sins they are willing to admit. We must be careful to listen for attempts to cover sin, cast blame or ignore responsibility for sin. These acts are only tools of Satan used to keep people from confessing their sins so they can receive Christ's forgiveness.

In all the examples mentioned and many more like them the genuine therapy begins with confession obtained through the application of the law. Therapy is completed through proper application of the gospel. That is therapy in the true sense of the word. It is healing. The process is not something new and different to us. We are, after all, nothing but preachers of the law and the gospel. People will go to

ridiculous extremes to avoid confronting sin. The Bible is full of examples of people who tried to avoid the confrontation. Secular psychology and counseling is likewise full of failures to hit the real mark.

Only God can accomplish genuine confession and absolution. He does it through the vehicle of his Means of Grace. That fact disappoints many people. As the pastor faithfully applies both law and gospel, sadly he may find reason to echo the words of Jesus, "You do not want to leave me too, do you?" (Jn 6:67). Just as at the time of Jesus, many people will do almost anything to avoid repentance. This may be one important reason for the proliferation of "self-help" materials. Buying a book is easier than repenting. Reading material of this kind numbers in the dozens in almost any book store. The only reason such material is available is that people will buy it. It goes without saying that people buy it because they want to help themselves in some way. People may also buy these books instead of facing their own guilt and seeking God's grace. In a sense, if you spend the money on a book, you have paid your dues. You have in the book the ways and means for helping yourself. You don't need the Bible, you don't need a pastor, you perhaps don't need to do anything else. Just read the book and it will provide you with suggestions for helping yourself. That way you can avoid confronting your own sin and your own relationship with God. Pastors may not counsel many people who deal with their problems this way. They don't think they need their pastors and, sad to say, they probably don't think they need their God much either.

Serious spiritual problems have no easy solutions. The secular market does little to provide acceptable alternatives to help us with our work. We always need to remember what a tremendous power tool we

have at our disposal when we are using the Word of God, both law and gospel. As we present the gospel to unhappy, troubled and confused people we are not just saying, "Jesus lived, died and rose again and that's all you need to know." We can apply the gospel to them and their situation in particular. For example, we can tell the depressed about God who cares about them. We can speak forgiveness for idolatry if the depressed person was putting himself or herself before God. The gospel is the tool that does the healing. God has entrusted us with the power that saves. The sin that is confessed will also be absolved. The debt is marked paid in full. The sinner can look at the full weight of his or her sin and see every bit of it paid in full and washed away.

In his book, Counseling and Confession, Walter J. Koehler makes a strong point for the practice of confession and absolution in pastoral counseling.

People need to "confess" their sin and guilt and secure relief. They continually seek out and turn to any individual, agency, or avenue which claims to offer release from the pressures of life. Furthermore, "open confessions" have become popular as they are stylized through novels, plays, films, memoirs, and diaries. It seems that people today possess a compulsion for confession. The church must take this need seriously. If the church continues to neglect resources like individual confession and absolution, she indicates that she is not truly concerned about a ministry of reconciliation and runs the danger of owing to people what they so very desperately need. The practice of individual confession and absolution involves both a ministry function on a local level through the office of the pastor, and the exercise of a ministry of reconciliation for everyone.³

Koehler complains that this precious tool of the church is too seldom used to bring the sinner into direct contact with his or her sin and God's grace. There is support for his complaint. Our point here lies behind what Koehler says. No genuine confession and absolution exists where there is no law and gospel. Koehler suggests a number of reasons

3. Walter J. Koehler, Confession and Counseling, St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1982, page 71.

why the practice of confession and absolution may have fallen by the wayside. One possibility he does not mention is that many church bodies that have delved into the field of pastoral psychology do not have the gospel with which to speak absolution. Perhaps the gospel is not popular enough for the marketplace. It certainly wasn't popular in the marketplace at the time of Jesus, St. Paul or even the Old Testament prophets.

We who have been blessed with the truth of Scripture are not exempt from seeking something other than the law and the gospel to do the work of healing the sinner. We can convince ourselves that something other than the Word of God can make our counseling work faster and easier. Maybe a pastor is uncomfortable with pastoral counseling and psychology and the individualized confrontations they demand. Maybe he thinks the simple truths of law and gospel work in the pulpit but something else works better in the counseling session? Perhaps it is easier to look at a church full of people and tell them very generally that they are sinners and Christ is their Savior than it is to apply that same message one-on-one. Whether one is easier than the other doesn't matter. Our responsibility to speak the Word of God is the same in both situations.

Without a doubt it is easier to turn on a tape or use a canned outline that was probably prepared in some branch of the Reformed Church than it is to present law and gospel so a troubled person can make a personally guided spiritual journey to the cross of Christ. What will determine whether such material is beneficial and whether we should use it or not? First, we should not need to question the existence and presentation of something as basic as law and gospel. We should not be in doubt about commitment to the Word of God. Second, no one is more

qualified and competent to speak law and gospel than those who claim the foundation of the pure Word of God with as much zeal as the members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Third, no one writing for the general public can possibly know as much as we know about the needs of the people we serve. We are the ones called by our congregations to apply sin and grace where as needed under any circumstances. No acceptable substitute exists for a clear understanding of sin and grace. No acceptable substitute exists for the Word of God.

Pastors in our circles know how to do effective biblical and Christian counseling. We have been provided with a solid foundation in the Word of God. That is the essential ingredient of biblical and Christian counseling. That fact is easy to forget. We may be too willing to seek the aid of someone or something other than the simple law and gospel to do this specialized work. We may hesitate to warn our people that dozens of popular self-help books and tapes on the market fail to make scriptural presentations. We may not be as sensitive as we should be to the special needs our people have. If we do not stand ready to listen to our people, they will find someone else who will listen. The chance that they will find help that would match ours is as slim. Not many agree point for point with our position on Scripture. Such a person or or such material would provide sound Christian and biblical counsel if we could find the person or the material. But why should we force our people to look elsewhere?

HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE ORIGIN OF ALL CORRECT TEACHING ABOUT OUR
SINFULNESS AND GOD'S MERCIFUL ACT TO JUSTIFY US FOR JESUS' SAKE
SO THAT WE LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

Who knows that better than we do?

NORM FOR PASTORAL COUNSELING

HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE STANDARD BY WHICH ALL EFFORTS MUST BE JUDGED WHICH ADDRESS OUR SINFULNESS AND A PEACEFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OURSELVES AND OTHERS FOR JESUS' SAKE SO THAT WE LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

This is the definition we have established for the normative use of Scripture in the practice of pastoral psychology and counseling. Our emphasis here is on the peaceful relationship with God, self and others as we live according to his will. Quite often in the thinking of modern counselors and counselees, God is not the one who determines what a peaceful relationship is. Without the norm of Scripture to reveal God's will, man is in the position of determining what constitutes peacefulness. This multiplies material on the subject of counseling attempting to address any and every problem that people think is keeping them from peacefulness. This multiplicity is profitable for publishers but not for troubled souls.

We can begin with the understanding that God wants us to have a peaceful relationship with him, ourselves and one another. His Word makes this abundantly clear. The Word also discloses the fact that such a threefold relationship of peace begins when we have peace with him. The promise of the Savior in Eden was a declaration of peace with God on God's terms. The rainbow following the flood was a declaration of peace on God's terms. The covenants of the Old Testament were either covenants of grace and peace, as with Abraham and David, or covenants of broken peace caused by sin, as at Sinai. The announcement the angels brought to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus was an announcement of peace. Jesus came to his disciples on occasions during his ministry with words of peace. The angel at the resurrection announced peace to troubled disciples through Christ's completed work. The apostles car-

ried the message of the peace of God that passes all understanding (Php 4:7).

These examples indicate the priority of peace with God, but they do not exhaust the expressions of God's will for peace in his Word. Philippians 4:7 speaks also of peace within ourselves. The message of the gospel is intended to give troubled consciences peace with God first and peace within ourselves as a consequence. In fact, St. John tells us that the facts of our salvation must outweigh any anxious thoughts we might have to the contrary.

Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the son does not have life (1 Jn 5:10-12).

In a similar way, peace with our neighbor is in full accordance with the will of God. The entire third use of the law indicates that where love for God exists, love for our neighbor will follow because God's love for us prompts both. Seven of the Ten Commandments deal with a peaceful relationship between the Christian and his neighbor resulting from his peaceful relationship with God. God wills that we live in peace with him and with our neighbor both.

Our source for doctrine and practice tells us that sin is at the root of problems that disrupt peace and that grace alone can reestablish it. As our norm, Scripture teaches us to apply this fact to the daily lives of our people. As we meet their counseling needs we attempt to determine what underlying sin is disrupting the peaceful relationship God wants them to have. A troubled sinner cannot find peace without uncovering the sin, confessing it and trusting Christ's redemption that paid for it.

We can illustrate this point with the example of unresolved guilt. Many people suffer with it. In some cases we must distinguish between guilt and guilt feelings. Guilt feelings may bother people more than the guilt itself. A son or daughter, for example, may feel guilty of neglecting a parent when the parent needs to be admitted to a nursing home. Such a setting may be the best place for the aged parent. A pastor can assure the son or daughter that this action was an action of love. The guilt of neglect may be resolved by realizing the action is loving and not sinful at all. No real guilt existed, only the guilt feeling.

Guilt feelings certainly do also accompany real guilt where God's laws actually have been broken. Again, the feeling of guilt for some people is worse than the guilt itself. For example, a pastor may counsel a member who feels guilty because of harsh words he spoke to a neighbor in anger. The member wants very much to get rid of those guilt feelings. On the other hand, he has no intentions of apologizing for the words he spoke in anger. He simply want to get rid of that guilty feeling. The member may think that assurance of forgiveness spoken personally is enough to take away those feelings of guilt. But that member has no real desire for forgiveness, he desires only emotional relief. Where is the repentance? He is not thinking about his unwillingness to apologize to another person. He does not want to get rid of the guilt. He is thinking only about his own feelings. Eventually those feelings will probably go away even without repentance and forgiveness. Anyone can make them go away. One simply learns to ignore his own conscience.

The pastor who has the Word of God as his norm knows the difference between real guilt and imagined guilt. He can also recognize the

difference between guilt and guilt feelings. With that equipment he can counsel a person clearly and accurately. Every pastor will make mistakes from time to time when he applies law and gospel, but the standard is still clear. We cannot call something sin if God does not say it is sin. We must recognize sin when we see it and call it by name. We cannot get rid of sin by getting rid of guilt feelings alone. We cannot get rid of guilt without the gospel. When the Word of God is the norm for our work, consciences have the Word of God to provide direction whether a person chooses to follow God's directions or not.

With Scripture as our norm we know that our aim is ultimately to administer the gospel. We do not preach the law for the law's sake alone. Many Christian counselors seem to forget that fact. Some Christian counselors seem very reluctant to address the matter of sin when the people they counsel are suffering. This reluctance shows clearly when some writers deal with depression. We have already seen how sin might be involved where we might not think to look for it. Even though we must recognize several possible organic explanations for depression, we must also recognize that depression may have spiritual causes and consequences.

Archibald Hart points out four ways in which depression may involve sin. (1) The cause of the depression may be sinful. (2) Depression can be sinful when we fail to take necessary steps to treat it. (3) Depression may be sinful when it is the consequence of giving power to others. (4) Depression can be sinful when we fail to rise up from our depression at the appropriate time.⁴ Hart might not agree with all the ways we have talked about in which depression involves sin, but we appreciate the clarifications he provides. These summary statements

4. Archibald D. Hart, Coping With Depression, Waco, Tex.: Word Publishers, 1984, pages 26-31.

help us to remember to deal with sin as sinful no matter where it appears. Unfortunately Dr. Hart does little to go beyond the goal of relieving depression. The gospel is sadly lacking.

Jay Adams, on the other hand, considers depression to be a spiritual problem completely. He gives an account of a person named Millie who was treated for years with psychiatry and medication only to remain in her depression.⁵ He states that the depression was cured only when her nouthetic counselor told her to stop behaving the way she was behaving. Millie made a remarkable recovery because she was strongly motivated to do so. Adams does not tell us what that strong motivation was, but it was not the gospel. It was something within Millie and others like her. That is as humanistic as any secular counselor could be. The sad fact is that Adams is a professed Reformed Christian. Adams is also completely unwilling to admit that psychological problems exist or that psychological cure is possible. Nevertheless, Millie's remarkable recovery sounds very much like Behavior Modification which a humanistic psychologist could use as a form of psychotherapy.

Both of these examples miss the point that the real healing agent in all these problems is the gospel. It brings forgiveness when hidden and unrepented sins are confessed and it provides motivation for God-pleasing behavior. The gospel is the full and factual historical statement of God's love for the world in Jesus Christ, who was promised and came, who lived perfectly and died innocently, who rose victoriously and reigns eternally. The gospel is not a vague statement about God's love. The Word of God records God's loves in actions, whether in creation, redemption or sanctification. The gospel the record of God's work for our salvation. The gospel is the message of eternal life and peace with

5. Jay Adams, Competent to Counsel, Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1970, pages 141-142.

God that enables believers to die to themselves and to the world and live to God (Romans 6-8). The gospel is the power of God, not only to believe the facts of God's love but to live them to their fullest in Jesus Christ and in our relationships with one another.

When the gospel message is applied to the sinner, God does the work of healing, not the words of the competent and well-trained counselor. It is the power of God at work through the message and the messenger that makes the gospel effective. The gospel produces the healing and provides the strength to accomplish God's goals for our good.

In the words of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes, anything that fails in measuring up to this norm of peace with God through the gospel is vanity. No one truly "gets better" without considering eternal peace with God. Humans are limited to the confines of this world and the death that is an integral part of it. Because of that eternal perspective, we may have difficulty measuring how successful we are in our counseling just as we may have difficulty measuring how successful we are in our ministries in general. We may have the same difficulty measuring our effectiveness as counselors. In everything we do as pastors, God expects faithfulness to his Word. He expects and demands nothing more or less than that.

We can and certainly will pray that the Lord will bless the counseling we do so that our troubled people will find some relief from whatever pain they may experience. We may even see a measure of the relief they seek. The goal of our counseling, however, is a closer relationship with God in Christ and only God can measure that. We cannot measure success and failure statistically the way secular counselors do.

We cannot compete with the secular counselor who wants to be able

to guarantee relief. He will measure his successes on the basis of whether people are less stressed, less depressed, more happy, more loving or what have you. He can simply ask whether counselees feel better, act better and remain in their improved condition. Those are things we can measure too. But the goals the secular counselor seeks, to us are only indications of the relationship our people have with God. We cannot compete with counselors and psychologists outside our biblical and Christian community because we have different goals. When we remember that the difference in those goals is the difference between heaven and earth, we might say more correctly that the secular community cannot compete with us.

With the eternal perspective Scripture establishes for us, our work is not finished when we have delivered the message of salvation in Christ. Our work is Christian and biblical, but that does not excuse carelessness in handling the daily problems our members have. We are servants of Christ. That is all the motivation we need to produce excellent workmanship to the best of our God-given ability. We preach each sermon as if our people might not be in church the next Sunday. God could call them to their eternal home then that. On the other hand, we preach each sermon as if our people will have seven more days in their time of grace. God never forgot about eternity when he sent Jesus Christ for our salvation. He also planned for our daily lives. God's people don't usually become Christians and then go directly to heaven. God's Word speaks to our lives on earth in view of heaven. So must we. Our office as pastors demands that we give our people the best we can give as we address their problems. We will have more to say about this in chapters eleven and twelve.

The fellowship of God's people is often spoken of as one of the

church's greatest assets as its members do their work together. In his book, Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer dedicates more than 125 pages to various aspects of community.⁶ Community, as Bonhoeffer sees it, is the fellowship of Christians at work together. Bonhoeffer considers this one of the most important responsibilities Christians have. While Bonhoeffer's book does encourage many of the same things that God expects and prompts from his people, he misses the essential point. Our fellowship in the visible church is a union of believers in Christ. The Holy Spirit creates faith and unity of faith through the Means of Grace. Bonhoeffer concentrates on the work we have to do as a fellowship. God's Word reminds us that through the Means of Grace the Holy Spirit produces works of sanctification. We have the Holy Spirit to thank when we have the privilege of living our sanctification as individuals or as a fellowship of believers. As a fellowship of believers united in Christ, we certainly have work to do.

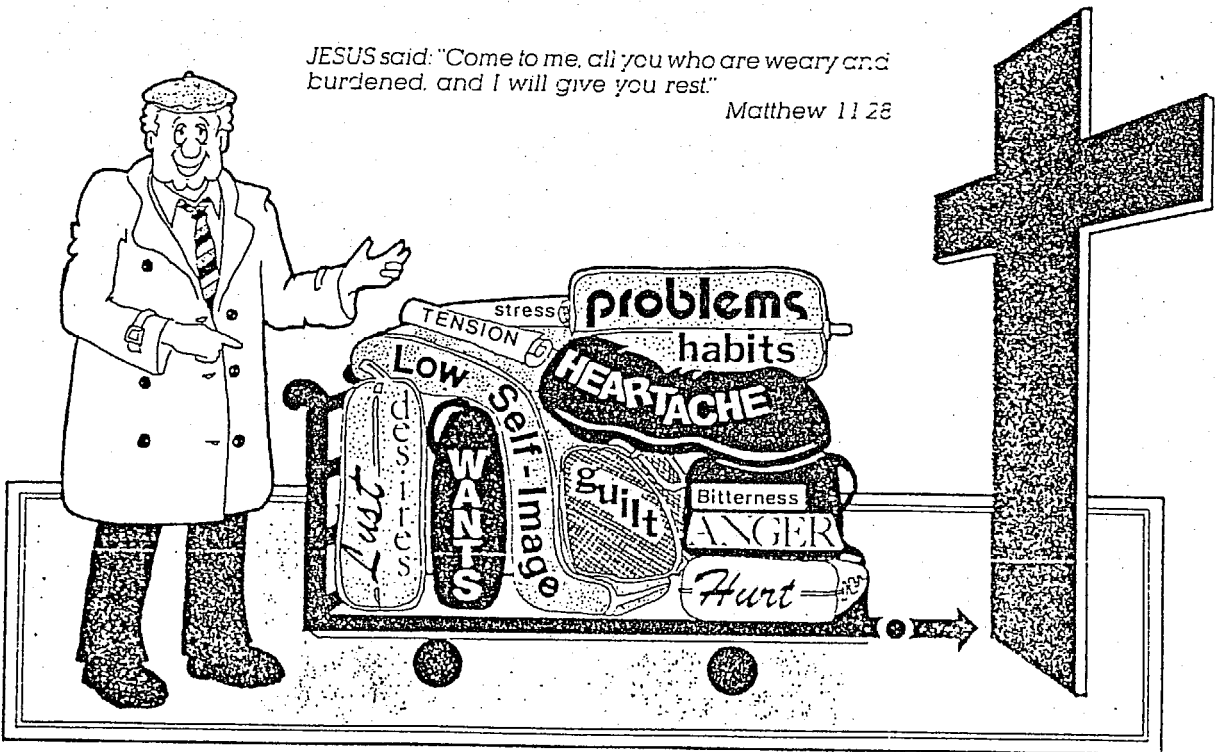
A recent invitational tract, shown on page 115, makes the relationship between God's Word and our daily lives very clear in view of our fellowship in Christ.

6. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, New York: Harper and Row, 1954.

CHRISTIANITY IS ABOUT BAGGAGE HANDLING

It's dumping guilt at the cross, where Jesus paid for it.
It's getting strength from the Lord to let go of what's dragging us down.
It's giving to the Lord in prayer what we can't handle.
It's Christians sharing the load to make life easier.

*JESUS said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and
burdened, and I will give you rest."
Matthew 11:28*



Stop in and check your baggage
with the rest of us.

This picture shows a man bringing a load of troubles to the cross of Christ where God handled all the baggage. The tract is also an invitation to a church that preaches the Word of God. Scripture speaks to the daily needs and works of the people of God on earth, and so must we. Secular counselors and even some biblical counselors tend to ignore an eternal view of life in Christ. We can easily tend toward the opposite extreme. We will want to be careful not to give the impression that we are so concerned about heaven that we don't know anything about life on earth. Our people shouldn't be surprised to learn that we know something about the difficulties they face, that we care about the people and their problems, and that we know something about dealing with them. Living our Christianity as people who know that we are in the world, but not of it is an essential part of our Christianity. We have the responsibility to do the best we can and provide the best material possible to help our people live God's way. We have all the tools necessary to address both the heavenly and the earthly needs of our people.

HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE STANDARD BY WHICH ALL EFFORTS MUST BE JUDGED WHICH ADDRESS OUR SINFULNESS AND A PEACEFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OURSELVES AND OTHERS SO THAT WE LIVE ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

Scripture, our norm, does not allow us to forget any of these responsibilities.