

**God's People—Pastor and the Priesthood of
All Believers—in Mission to the Unbelievers**

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It's been an interesting journey. I still remember back in North Platte, Nebraska, that one night—it might have been the first night—when I was on an evangelism call. Our Redeemer Lutheran Church offered evangelism training through a revised James Kennedy Dialog Evangelism process.

Sitting there on the couch in the front room of that trailer house, listening to the lead person of the group present the familiar outline—grace, man, God, Christ, faith—I still remember quite vividly my contemplation: “Why am I sitting here? I could not care less whether these people go to hell or not.”

Now, all the people sitting in the front room of that trailer house in North Platte, Nebraska, year 1978 had no idea that Randy Golter's heart was in such a state of crustiness. The Lord knew, of course, and I was one more headache for Him along with a portion of His holy, Christian church of all time.

We just heard from Dr. Reed Lessing about Jonah's expectation and even presumption of God's mercy. Jonah readily applied God's determined tendency to forgive sinners to himself but not to those who by their rank wickedness placed themselves beyond the pale of God's mercy. How ironic that the idol worshipers—those on the boat and in the great city of Nineveh—got it right by the Spirit's power better than that professional church worker!

Idolatry is idolatry whether it is crass or refined, done by believer or unbeliever. Idolatry within the church is more difficult to diagnose, it seems to me. Refined idolatry, that is, a polished idolatry, is much more acceptable, especially within the church. It's hard to diagnose because myopic sight can't see beyond the nose. Consider the John 9 text from the Lent 4, Year A readings where the institutionalized church could not even see through a spiritually blind person who was given sight. The balm for all heart-blindness stood right before them. The great eye doctor, Jesus, diagnosed their blindness and offered Himself as the curative for spiritual blindness, but they still did not see. The institutionalized church remained as blind as a gopher at high noon.

Obviously much time has passed since the year 1978 when I was sitting on the couch of that trailer house in North Platte, Nebraska. The Lord God has been patient with me and has opened my eyes to see many things. He has crafted me while in the saddle of His parish ministry for eighteen years. He has honed me by the scholars at the seminary, the lecturers at the symposia, and by rubbing shoulders with His priesthood of all believers in the parish.

And now He has placed me as a supervisor of churches and workers, giving me a vantage point that was never ever on my radar screen. The Lord, through your casting of the ballots and your prayers, has taken me a step away from the parish ministry in order to oversee His precious workers, His churches, and His mission.

I speak to you this day from this perspective: a sinner redeemed by the Lord God Himself, chosen before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4, 5). I also speak to you as one who has a hunger for the Word of God as well as for those who don't know God by faith as you and I do. I speak to you as one who desperately desires His church—pastors and the priesthood of all believers—to be faithful to His Word and mission.

Yes, how this heart has changed from 1978. The Spirit has a way of getting His point across. Ask Jonah about God's tenacious ways of not letting His servant go to the apparently luxurious confines of Tarshish, that possible distant paradise away from God's call!¹ Consider your own pilgrimage of faith, how He has matured you in the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the hound dog of heaven, persistently pursuing the lost as He cares for and works through His church to reach the lost.

I also speak to you within the context of a church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, that, beginning under the leadership of Dr. Barry as president in the late 1990's, started LCMS World Missions. *Ablaze!* was adopted in 2004, and now under Dr. Kieschnick as the Synodical President, it is growing up to be a church-and-world-wide mission effort to seek and to save the lost. The attempt is to get the church to focus on the fields that are white unto harvest.

Now, whatever your opinion is of this Synodical venture—and *Ablaze!* surely has had its theological challenges as it has needed biblical sturdying to be more consistent with Lutheran theology—you must agree that it definitely has many people thinking about the critical engagement of an unbeliever with God's Word. I have noticed a greater awareness of and more conversations among pastors and laity who are thinking about church plants within their own contexts. Brothers, this is a good thing. Jonah was not thinking of starting a preaching station in Nineveh!

I remember not too many years ago that we were debating levels of fellowship. The worship wars began in the late 1980's and that conversation continues. The seventies, of course, dealt with the church's reaction to an aberrant hermeneutical tool for the interpretation of Scripture. *Ablaze!* however, has once again brought up the discussion of a proper mission theology. It has sensitized the church to mission, to many questions about mission, including doctrine and/or mission, church, and ministry. What comes first, doctrine or mission or is there even a priority? What about doctrine, does it not save, as St. Paul states in 1 Timothy 4:16?

¹ See Reed Lessing *Jonah*, Concordia Commentary. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), p. 73. "In Jonah it is possible to understand Tarshish as functioning in a double entendre—as a specific geographic location but also as any place of luxury, desire, and delight."

The church needs to dialogue continually. Discussing, studying, debating theology is healthy for the church, even commanded by the Spirit in Ephesians 4:3. “Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” the Spirit tells the church. *Spoudazo* is the root word there translated as “eager.”² The Holy Spirit uses the noun form of that word as a descriptor for the Virgin Mary’s travel to see her cousin Elizabeth after the angel’s proclamation of the Savior within her womb. She “went with haste” into the hills, Luke writes (1:39). Again Luke uses that word to portray the shepherds’ haste to see the Christ Child after hearing the angelic choir’s proclamation of the incarnation. Once Christ captures the soul, not only is there an urgent need to embrace and tell others of the Savior but also the need to maintain the integrity of His communication. Christ causes horizontal, ethical impulses upon and through the church to others within the church and to those outside.

And so the church discusses theology and its integrity. The church in Acts had to get a grasp on circumcision and Gentile-inclusion and address Judaism and its dirtying of justification. Each church in every era has its challenges. The question is: How does the church approach such issues? What tools are to be used, what doctrines apply, what attitudes are to be exhibited in the discussions so that no opportunity is given to the devil (Ephesians 4:29) to distract and/or divide the Lord’s church from His doctrine and His mission?

I give you then a perspective that is decidedly biased, crafted from years of ministry and being in the schoolroom of the Holy Spirit, as you have been and are. It is my prayer that this bias is Holy Spirit sculpted, as is the prayer of every person here today.

Therefore, I will discuss this proposed topic from various angles. I will discuss the foundational doctrine of the church, justification, and how it applies to God’s mission through His church. The second part concerns itself with the church’s identity—both as pastors and as the priesthood of all believers—as the Master’s slaves.

This paper will fundamentally demonstrate that God’s mission through His church to the unbelievers is not rocket science. He is the One who owns the mission and works the mission through His church. God supplies the tools that the church uses to do God’s mission, that is, His living voice in His Word. The fundamental doctrine of God’s Word is God’s justification of sinners.

Part One: God Justifies the Ungodly – Justification

One can hardly imagine discussing any kind of mission work or an operative mission doctrine without beginning, continuing, and ending with what Lutherans call the fundamental principle upon which the church is either standing or falling: justification.³

² Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, eds. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), Vol. VII, p. 559-568.

³ The origin of the Latin phrase *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* is not known. See J.A.O. Preus III and his article “Justification by Faith: The *Articulus Stantis et Cadentis Ecclesiae*,” endnote 5, p. 279 in

Our theologians call justification the material principle, the lens through which all of Scripture, the formal principle, is viewed. Such a presupposition readily teaches and assumes that justification is God's view of the world, which includes the church and the unchurched.

Since this is heaven's view, and God is invading this space with this determined bias, one must also acknowledge that His view is far different from the earthly perspective. In other words, the doctrine of justification is still relevant—if anyone is asking—because man is all the time trying to justify himself. Ask a religious question of a person next to you, and the usual response is a continual litany of all the good things he has done, whether true or not, in order to justify himself. It may not even be that explicit! In today's spiritually orientated culture, many a person will offer his not-too-subtle scheme of getting holier, but that is still self-justification.

Under this section I want to spend a little time teaching what you already know, and what your new man loves to hear, and what the church needs to hear constantly. I would say that this is the *evangelical* substance of the Lutheran church, something that we dare never lose. It must be the air that we breathe and the sustenance that is digested. Justification is the feeding tube that, if removed, the patient dies. Justification is the constant and daily dose of balm that every pastor must apply by faith to himself before he begins another day. Justification is the reason and motivation for doing mission as God's people, whether as the pastor or as a member of the priesthood of all believers.

Justification is the non-negotiable center⁴ and the determinative persuasion and crafting influence for every thing that is taught and done in and by the church. Even though Christ's justifying the world was a past event, it remains a present reality that orders the activity of the church—both doctrine and practice.

Fundamentally, justification is God's work. You and I know this but it must be said again. Justification is God's work; it is that simple. I would like to spend quite a bit of time on one of my favorite passages for this brilliant truth: Romans 4:5. "And to the one who does not work but trusts *him who justifies the ungodly*, his faith is counted as righteousness."⁵ I emphasize pointedly "him who justifies the ungodly." One might ask to whom Paul refers. The next verse makes it quite clear. "Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works" (v. 6). God is the referent.

Paul by the Spirit's influence uses *dikaioo* to refer to God's determined action toward sinners. The context makes it clear that God is not infusing the ungodly with some kind

And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel, eds. Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Chelsea: BookCrafters, 1990), 264 – 282.

⁴ See "The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution," eds. Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder. Authors are listed in the front but not assigned to any of the chapters. In an article entitled "After the Death of Evangelism—The Resurrection of an Evangelizing Church," is the following quotation. "Beginning with Luther and the Reformers, concentration on justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone has been the centering focus. All theology is then ordered in relationship to this nonnegotiable center" p. 113.

⁵ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

of ethical power whereby they are able to do ethical acts, and by these ethical acts God then considers them as righteous people. God would be then the judge or king waiting on the individual to somehow come through with ethical behavior as legitimate proof and even cause for a divine declaration of justification.

Paul, however, clearly states that the one who is considered righteous—the basic meaning of *dikaioo*⁶—has no capacity in God’s work of justifying. Paul reveals this in at least two ways. First, he shows by his indicative language that the sinner’s participation is merely trust.

Trust evokes images of a person’s cooperative will along with God’s help. We will get to that in a minute. First, though, I want to spend a bit of time on the non-denominational bent of expressing faith as “I believe.” I believe I believe because I believe. Thus, the very act of my believing becomes the assurance and certainty that I believe. A *fides reflecta* in reality causes all kinds of consternation and/or false assurance to saints who are fully sinners at the same time.

Phillip Cary, an Anglican theologian, writes in the recent *Concordia Theological Journal* under the title “*Sola Fide*: Luther and Calvin”: “Protestant faith has to be reflective in that it is not enough just to believe; you have to *believe* you believe, maybe even *know* you believe. That is a pretty hefty requirement for those of us who are weak in faith, or who believe that all sin is rooted in unbelief and we are still sinners at heart (*simul Justus et peccator*, both justified and sinner still).⁷

The Holy Spirit does not bind the believer to such wayward and weak directives. If believing is based on the believer, what will be the outcome and confidence for that same believer—or group of believers, the church—to accomplish God’s mission of justifying the ungodly? If one does not get conversion right, then surely the mission to the lost becomes decidedly anthropocentric as well. Using a golf analogy, the less the pure striking of the ball at impact, the more errant the three-hundred-yard drive.

Those whose ears are bent in the direction of non-denominational theology as well begin to view trust as some kind of contribution from the person doing the trusting. Lutherans immediately recite quite correctly Luther’s explanation of the Third Article. “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel ...”⁸

Faith or trust is not a work of man as if faith contributes to what Christ does. “For faith does not justify or save because it is a good work in itself, but only because it accepts the

⁶ TDNT, Vol. II, p. 215. “For Paul the word *dikaion* does not suggest the infusion of moral qualities, a *justum efficere* in the sense of the creation of right conduct. It implies the justification of the ungodly who believe, on the basis of the justifying action of God in the death and resurrection of Christ.”

⁷ Philip Cary, “*Sola Fide*: Luther and Calvin,” in *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No.3/4, Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, July/October, 2007, p. 267.

⁸ Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986, p. 15.

promised mercy,” the Apology states.⁹ Faith itself is a divine gift and its divinely assigned role is completely subsidiary and decidedly passive in its receptive role of God’s blood-bought riches.¹⁰

Paul eliminates any synergistic thinking when in chapter three he teaches that all a sinner is capable of doing is unrighteous acts. “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God” (Romans 3:10-11). He further states in verse 19 “so that every mouth may be stopped,” that is, no one is even able to offer a verbal argument for being or acting righteous. “Stopped” (*phrabei* from the root word *phrasso*) is in the passive voice, that is, the divine passive. God is the One closing the mouth of every sinner.

The author of Hebrews uses this same verb in 11:33, “the prophets who through faith ... stopped the mouths of lions.” The author does not mention Daniel by name, but it is Daniel. He is portrayed as the one who closed the mouths of the lions. And he did—as he were—as he trusted the God who actually did the shutting of the lions’ mouths. The Old Testament text actually credits God as the One doing the shutting. “The king declared to Daniel, ‘O Daniel ... has your God ... been able to deliver you from the lions?’” (Daniel 6:20). And Daniel declares what happened, “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me” (Daniel 6:22).

Daniel did the believing and he by faith—according to the holy historian’s reckoning in Hebrews 11:33—closed the mouths of the lions. This is quite stunning! God sent an angel to actually close the lions’ mouths; however, according to God’s arithmetic it is just as correct to state that His prophet did the shutting of the lions’ mouths, as the Hebrews’ author writes.

What is the point? Daniel could not, in and of himself, close any lion’s mouth, even if he took HGH (Human Growth Hormone)! By faith, though, he did do such a thing as declared by the Holy Spirit in the book of Hebrews. Yet, it was in reality God doing the shutting, and Daniel the believing.

The point, however, is this: If a believer can do things only by the power of God and Spirit-worked faith in the Lord, how much less can an unbeliever who lies in unfaith and has no access at all to God’s power? Paul in Romans 3:19 addresses all people before conversion and the Spirit’s entry. Unbelievers are unbelievers and therefore not believers. God shuts out any possibility that anyone before faith opens his mouth to confess Jesus as Lord. “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). The lions could not open their mouths because God shut them. Unbelievers cannot open their mouths to confess trust in God because God has shut their hearts.

⁹ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), par. 56, p. 114.

¹⁰ On the role of faith in justification, see Kurt Marquart, “Reformation Roots of ‘Objective Justification’” in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus*, eds. Kurt Marquart, John R. Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen. (Lake Mills: Graphic Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 117 – 130. “It must be clear, however, that faith has a completely subsidiary, humble, passive function in justification. It neither creates nor enhances the gift, but merely receives it,” p. 120.

By what means does God shut the mouths of the unbelievers? He uses His accusatory law. Is it not quite wonderful? The unbelievers actually use God’s law—either the written or the natural law written on the heart—for the express purpose of self-justification, a fundamental misuse of God’s law. The purpose of God’s law is quite different. The Confessions state:

The chief function or power of the law is to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become. So the law must tell him that he neither has nor cares for God or that he worships strange gods—something that he would not have believed before without a knowledge of the law.¹¹

The unbeliever knows only one way to approach God and that is self-justification through the law. God, however, uses the very same law to stop their mouths. “This, then, is the thunderbolt by means of which God with one blow destroys both open sinners and false saints. He allows no one to justify himself.”¹²

The point here is obvious: God justifies the sinner, for the sinner cannot justify himself. God has made it impossible for it to happen. The sinner cannot trust God; it’s an impossible action from the side of the sinner. Therefore, not only is the sinner’s nature incapable of an act of trust in God—an act alien to and utterly impossible for the sinner—but God actually closes the mouth of the unbeliever by His accusatory law. Therefore, Paul’s reference to trust in Romans 4:5 does not imply in any way the tiniest bit of contribution of effort or works from the sinner’s side. God really does the justifying and He alone justifies.

Secondly, faith or trust itself is a creation of God alone who justifies the ungodly. Paul argues in Romans 10:14-17 not only the impossibility of any unbeliever trusting in God apart from hearing the Gospel but also that faith or trust itself is created by the Gospel. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (10:17).

Take note of Paul’s reference to the “word of Christ” in that verse. Paul here uses *rematos* with the preposition *dia* along with the genitive *christou*, indicating this Word of Christ as the instrument through which God creates faith in the heart of an unbeliever.

To what does Paul refer by using *rematos*? Paul uses *rematos* in Ephesians 5:26, “That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” In the next chapter (6:17), he writes, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Paul makes it clear that it is the Bible, God’s Word that creates faith. Baptism is referenced in Eph 5:26 as “the washing of water with the word.” That word then is the Word that is preached, stated, spoken alone, or connected to water. And through this Word the Holy Spirit uses it as a causative and instrumental agent to create faith where there was once no faith.

¹¹ Tappert, SA, Part III, Art. II, par. 4, p. 303.

¹² Ibid, Part III, Art. III, par. 2, p. 304.

God justifies the ungodly through the Word. I would like to spend a little time, therefore, with this concept alone, for it has tremendous ramifications for justification and mission.

I remember a summer extension class in the 1980's in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, that Robert Preus taught on the Doctrine of the Word. The class was an eye-opening experience for me as he simply taught how the apostles used and trusted the Word. And then he went through how Jesus used the Word—by the way, Jesus used *rematos* as He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. Our Lord Jesus had confidence in the Word, so why don't you, was Robert Preus's point!

Dr. Preus in an article entitled "The Power of God's Word"¹³ lists the unfolding ways in which God communicated His will: the spoken Word, dreams or visions, the written Word in the Old Testament, His actions, and the final Word of God to man in His Son. People are directed to the Son's words when the Father directs all to "listen to him" (Matthew 17:5). Dr. Preus then writes, "And we hear Him when we hear His apostles, whose word is His Word (John 17:14)."¹⁴ The apostles' word then is nothing but God's communication and is in fact God's continuing communication to man.

Dr. Preus concludes:

Now when we consider these various ways in which God speaks to us, we find that there is a marvelous unity in the Word of God. There is no difference between God directly speaking, His speaking through the mouth of a prophet or apostle, and the formulation of this speech in writing. Scripture quite simply calls the word of God's servants and penmen the words of God. Furthermore, no distinction is made between their preached and written Word. It is all the same utterance of God to men. ...Thus there is one Word of God, although we may speak of it as taking on different forms according to God's condescension. 'We have the Word of God in the preaching of the evangelists, in Baptism, in the Sacrament, and in the absolution,' Luther says. God can even speak through an ass, if need be.¹⁵

The implications are quite clear. God justifies the ungodly through the power of His Word. He does not ordinarily speak from the sky or through visions or dreams. All the apostles have died. The apostles' words though are still with us. The Word of God is God's Word and the Spirit uses this Word to do His surgical procedures on the hearts of men. The Word does this to those who are absolutely incapable of opening their mouths to claim Jesus as Lord. Through the preaching, teaching, and telling of His Word by pastors and laity, God is creating faith where there is no faith when and where He wills. By the same Word God is sustaining faith in the hearts of believers. Faith is of such a nature that not only its creation but also its preservation is the Spirit's work. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). Paul in Romans 1:16 states that

¹³ Robert Preus, "The Power of God's Word" in *Doctrine as Life*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 101.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 101-02.

“the gospel ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” The same Word is presently at work in believers. Paul tells the Thessalonians that “you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). And Isaiah speaks of the Word as rain that comes down from heaven (55:10-11), accomplishing the very purpose of God, that is, to save.

The heart and soul of Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 is Jesus’ Word, God’s Word, the causative and sustaining Word. Baptizing and teaching would be nothing if it were not God’s Word as core, active substance, and power of both. Paul recognizes this when he teaches the Corinthians who had a tendency to be wowed by the professional rhetoricians. “And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

Here we see the Trinitarian act of God’s justifying through His Word. God communicates His Word to men; Jesus, the enfleshed Word, is the content of the Word as He taught the Emmaus disciples in Luke 24:27; and the Holy Spirit utilizes the Word to do the Father’s justifying of the ungodly.

God justifies the ungodly by sending His Son to be the ungodly one in the place of the ungodly. Through His holy life, sacrificial death, and resurrection, God considers the world of sinners as righteous as His Son. This message, the Gospel of justification, God the Spirit uses as it is preached, taught, and applied through its communication and when His name is spoken and water poured.

God justifying the sinner fashions the way mission is accomplished within the context of non-denominational theology. This is very challenging, especially when so many Lutherans are drinking at the well of popular preachers.

One such popular preacher is Joel Osteen whose book is entitled *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*.¹⁶ Are you able to discern the chaff of self-justification from the wheat of God justifying the sinner in the following paragraphs?¹⁷

God wants you to be a winner, not a whiner. There is no reason for you to be perpetually living “under the circumstances,” always down, always discouraged. No matter how many times you get knocked down, keep getting back up. God sees your resolve. He sees your determination. And when you do everything you can do, that’s when God will step in and do what you can’t do.¹⁸

And again:

¹⁶ Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York: Warner Faith, 2004). See Larry Rast’s paper, “Faith in Contemporary Evangelicalism,” unpublished.

¹⁷ This portion of the paper is from my paper entitled “Justification: The Lutheran Habit” presented at Greeley, Colorado, for the Lay Theological Conference on February 18, 2006.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

God is keeping a record of every good deed you've ever done. He is keeping a record of every seed you've ever sown. You may think it went unnoticed, but God saw it. And in your time of need, He will make sure that somebody is there to help you. Your generous gifts will come back to you. God has seen every smile you've ever given to a hurting person. He's observed every time you went out of the way to lend a helping hand. God has witnessed when you have given sacrificially, even giving money that perhaps you needed desperately for yourself or your family. God is keeping those records. Some people will tell you that it doesn't make any difference whether you give or not, or that it doesn't do any good. But don't listen to those lies. God has promised that your generous gifts will come back to you. In your time of need, *because of your generosity*, God will move heaven and earth to make sure you are taken care of (emphasis added).¹⁹

“Because of your generosity” now God will act! But the ungodly have nothing to contribute and, apart from Christ, we are all ungodly. God does not act because of our action or in-action but because of His Son. Faith should not be directed toward a person's greater effort but to the One who expended Himself on the Cross of Calvary! Justification is God acting outside of us, completely apart from us! And He does it in and on account of Christ.

The Lutheran who is operating with the doctrine of justification as habit will sniff out these subtle shifts away from God alone working, justifying, sanctifying, saving, and carrying the sinner all the way to heaven. Theology like that of Joel Osteen, popular though he is, just doesn't wash with God, nor does it with you and me. The Holy Spirit through His Holy Book has taught us the way, and that way causes us to think as we do: justification, justification, justification. In other words, it is all Jesus: doing, working, converting, saving, even carrying the sinner. And the sinner believes this like a seven-year-old child. That has tremendous implications for the Lutheran Church and God's mission.

I have spent most of this time mainly on God's teaching through Paul in Romans. I present to you operational principles for Lutherans as God uses His church to accomplish His mission.

1. God justifying the sinner gives all glory to God.

The camel's nose of pride ever sneaks to get into the tent. The church grows by God's power and by His power alone. “God gave the growth,” says St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:6. “My glory I will not give to another,” the Lord says in Isaiah 48:11b. The doctrine of justification gives all glory to God for saving sinners.

2. God justifying the sinner is the power and purpose of God's mission through His church.

¹⁹ Ibid., 262 .

God's action of justifying the sinner directs the church to what she is to do by faith, for it is what God has done and is ever doing. The church then aligns her tasks to His, the justifying of the ungodly. God's present tense work and every moment of passion of justifying by the Spirit's tool of the Word includes the believer and the unbeliever. The church lives under the sky of justification as she invades the world with God's justifying Word. She herself needs the same application of justification as she goes about His task of justifying sinners who do not yet believe.

3. God justifying the sinner reveals the absolute incapacity for man to justify himself.

Man is completely incapacitated by sin and will only seek to justify himself before God. The church conducts God's mission with a clear-headed understanding that unbelievers have as little power to lift themselves to believe the Word as a dead man does to lift himself from the grave. Unbelievers cannot convert themselves or help in any way.

4. God has given to the church the means for justifying sinners: the Word. The Word, then, must not be kept under a bushel basket, no!

God spoke and caused everything that existed to be. "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Psalm 33:9). He speaks now through His written and spoken Word. The church goes about His mission with complete confidence that as she speaks through her appointed pastors and the baptized in their vocational callings, He will bring home His elect through His communicated Word.

The church, therefore, must not dirty God's Word in any way, nor should she hide the Word, keeping it only for herself. "And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard?" (Romans 10:14b).

Jesus went to Zacchaeus (Luke 19) and even invited Himself over to Zacchaeus' house. Jesus did not direct him to go to the Temple in Jerusalem where the divine service was going on. Jesus brought the Word to the sinner at the sinner's house, and the sinner was driven by the Word to where the Word would nourish and sustain faith.

5. Any means or method that does not explicitly trust and use God's Word as the sole means to justify the sinner will not accomplish God's mission.

The unbeliever will by nature be seduced by manipulation and will seek entertainment instead of atonement. He will look for the wow and will base "faith" on experience or emotion. The Word does not entertain, but it does atone by the proclamation of justification. Luther's Theses on the Heidelberg Disputations reveal the heart of mission for every pastor and the church. "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through the suffering and the cross."²⁰ Lutheran mission must be and ever operate under the theology of the cross, not under the theology of glory.

²⁰ Thesis 20, *Luther's Works*. (LW) AE 31, p. 52.

6. God's mission is not all about numbers.

God does add sinners to His church, but He also sustains sinners through the power of the Word that justifies. The nature of faith is such that it constantly needs the nourishing power of justification. The proclamation of the Gospel must be core and central *within* the church as God uses the church to penetrate the culture.

The church, though, by the Spirit's power, must reflect as to whether she is getting out the Word by every possible means. No longer is "church-going" a part of the American culture. The church must, therefore, get God's means of justifying out to the sinners, wherever they are. The church can too easily slide into the belief that she is faithful in the proclamation through the Word and the Sacraments while not recognizing the fact that the Word remains within the walls of the church. If the unbelievers are absolutely incapable of coming to faith, how is the church to get God's power to them? Let not the church's inactivity be the limiting factor for God's justifying. Let's not be liberal in theology, but let's be liberal in the casting of God's seed *into* the world.

The priesthood of all believers represents the greatest numbers in terms of storytellers of the Good News in their vocational calling. Have we utilized them sufficiently? We must not discount the power of the Holy Spirit as He engages them in the Divine Service through the Word and Sacraments. Are they being trained to exegete the culture as well as the Word so that they can fully engage those caught up in the bewitching theologies out there in the city streets? They are fully baptized priests, but they aren't fully developed priests. Here we need much work, it seems to me.

Let God take care of the numbers as His church engages the unbelievers with a myriad of His mouthpieces giving a defense for the only hope in this world.

7. God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—accomplishes His mission and at the same time the church accomplishes His mission. God had Sychar (John 4) and Nineveh (Jonah) in mind; He desired their salvation, for He understood His spilled blood was for everyone. He did not, though, place a speaker in the heavens to boom His message directly from the sky. He converted the town prostitute, and she went into the town to witness. His disciples remained at the well, not understanding their Savior's desire to harvest souls in Sychar through their proclamation. God persistently kept after Jonah, and worked through His reluctant prophet's short sermon to convert the whole city of Nineveh.

The mission is God's, and yet it is the church's mission, and she by faith accomplishes what He does through the church's activity of the proclamation of the Gospel. God gave the mission to the Son, and the Son now has invited the church to join in His justifying of sinners through His Word applied. It's all quite spectacular and humbling!

Part Two: God's Church Is God's Church

1. The Church is God's slave made up of pastors and priests who serve the Master and His wishes

What has not been explicitly said in the previous section on justification is the obvious: Since God has justified the church, He owns the church. Christ's life is now her life and His beating passion to justify the ungodly is also hers as well. The church has no independent existence, identity or desire apart from the One who purchased her with His own blood.

I approach this particular part in a rather strange way, but hear me out. I heard a significant lecture over a year ago on slavery by Dr. John Nordling at the Ft. Wayne Symposium. Dr. Nordling took much of what he had written on slavery in his *Philemon* commentary and presented at least a portion of it to the attendees.

What was most stunning to me was the understanding of slavery in the first century. A slave had no independent existence apart from his master. He was regarded "as an animated tool, a piece of property (*res*), and so a being without any personhood whatsoever: 'We compare slavery closely to death.'" ²¹ A slave, therefore, had to align himself totally to his master, as the master understood this to be the case. The slave was considered "an extension of his master's body and so was used by households to execute contracts that were binding upon the master." ²²

A slave had no life apart from his master. His master wholly owned him; he was wholly under his care and directives. He had no liberty except the liberty of service to his master.

Consider this in light of Paul's reference to himself in his letter to the Church of Rome (Rom. 1:1) and to Titus (Titus 1:1) as a "servant of Christ Jesus," that is, a "slave" of Christ Jesus. Paul was writing to people who knew slaves, or were slaves, or knew someone who had slaves. They understood the nature of slavery. They also understood that a slave found his identity and whole life in his master.

The apostle uses the Greek word *doulos* (slave) to refer to himself. This culturally loaded word is translated as servant in the English, but *doulos* has great significance for the prophetic office that falls in line with the apostolic office, the office of pastor. Pastors are wholly owned by Christ. The Son of God's identity is wholly theirs by grace, and pastors are so owned and called by God that He even uses them to speak in His stead. When a pastor forgives sin—repeating what Jesus says—God Himself is speaking through that communicated message of Law or Gospel. God's power is executed through that Word coming from the lips of the Master's slave. Again, the unity of the Word is portrayed here, from what God has given to His apostles, to what the apostles have preached and

²¹ See John G. Nordling, *Philemon*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), p. 44.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 44 -5.

written to the church, to what the called pastors are given to proclaim from the pulpit in the church and to the world.

Pastors, though, are not the only ones whom the Spirit labels as “slaves.” “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling ... not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants [slaves] of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,” Paul writes in Eph. 6:5-6. The first occurrence of “slave” refers to a vocational relationship with an earthly master; the second to a baptismal relationship to a heavenly Master. And the ones to whom Paul writes are the people of God in their baptismal standing.

Peter refers to God’s people as “slaves” in 1 Peter 2:16. “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants [slaves] of God.” Peter points out the paradoxical existence of a person who is baptismally chained to Jesus Christ. The slave finds his greatest freedom in living a life of holiness, for indeed he is as holy as his Master Jesus. The point here is that Peter refers to God’s laity as “slaves.”

Now just a quick perusal of the New Testament reveals that by far the occurrence of slave—other than a vocational reference to an actual slave—is to God’s called pastors and apostles.²³ There are exceptions as was just mentioned, but by far the balance is tilted toward the apostolic and pastoral office.

I would like to mention to you the aged Apostle John’s use of slave in Revelation. In his prologue he writes. “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants [slaves] the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant [slave] John” (Rev. 1:1). Dr. Brighton notes the very interesting distinction between a slave and a servant. He states that “a slave is owned by a master and owes his very life to the master. John recognizes that he is a slave to Christ, as are the apostles and all believers. While *doulos* [slave] appears some fourteen times in Revelation, *diakonos* [servant] does not appear at all.”²⁴

The Spirit’s use of *doulos* in Revelation may very well be the fact that Christ’s slaves, though faced with persecution that may lead to death, must remember they are wholly owned by their master, Jesus Christ. Not even loss of life can break the bondage to their Master. In the Father’s eyes He, as Master of the vineyard, can no more disown or let go of His slaves than can the Father disown or let go of His Son.

The First Commandment’s teaching also applies. Jesus’ walk through the Seven Churches in Revelation reveals a continuing slide toward other gods by embracing their teachings. “But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel ... You have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (Rev. 2:14, 15). Does Jesus refer to the laity or to the pastor(s)? Even though Balaam was a prophet—and

²³ Rom. 1:1; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Col. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1.

²⁴ See Louis A. Brighton, *Concordia Commentary Revelation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1999), p. 34.

therefore, the direct parallel to the pastoral office is explicit—one would have to conclude that Jesus’ focus is on the church of slaves, both the pastor(s) and the people.

What particular sin did they commit that was opposed to their identity as slaves of Christ? Dr. Brighton writes: “The sin of Balaam, as can be deduced from the role he played between the Moabites (and Midianites) and Israel, was that of wanting both God and money (Matt. 6:24) ... He knew he had to remain faithful to God and his word. But at the same time he desired the honor and riches that were promised to him if he heeded Balak’s request.”²⁵ And then Dr. Brighton concludes, “The sin and teaching of Balaam was the attempt to serve two masters, God and mammon (human honors and material wealth Matt. 6:24).”²⁶

Dr. Brighton refers to our Lord’s preaching. Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:24 are quite stunning. “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Jesus states in no uncertain terms that a person cannot be enslaved (*douleuein* – present, active, indicative) to two masters. You are not able, capable, and do not have the power to be able to do both. No such reality exists is what Jesus preaches to the Sermon on the Mount crowds.

The indicative mood means reality; Jesus’ words are descriptive of how life is as a slave. One cannot in any way, shape, or form be bound to two masters. Thus, the Spirit’s exhortations through Paul’s pen is this, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves to sin have become obedient from the heart ... having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18).

Paul writes those verses in the context of what he had just written about the power and reality of baptismal washing earlier in Romans 6. Through the Word and water applied, God creates a slave of righteousness from a slave to sin. God justifies the ungodly by connecting the ungodly one to the Son’s crucifixion that crucified sin once and for all on the Cross of Calvary. There is new life, a whole new existence, the only life that matters to God and for the world.

Baptismal identity has horizontal, ethical, and evangelistic implications. The slave—as corporate church, pastor, or individual Christian—does not have an existence, identity, or purpose apart from the Master. The Church is the slave of God and no one else. Therefore, she is to be so aligned to and is an extension of the Master that the slave executes the Master’s will that is binding upon the Master. “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

²⁵ Ibid, p. 77.

²⁶ Ibid.

The Father executes His will through His Son, that is, to save the world. His Son executes the Father's will by His sacrificial life, death, and resurrection. Jesus liberates the world—a world-forgiveness²⁷—by offering Himself as *the* disobedient slave, as if He had been enslaved completely to sin and the devil. This Slain Lamb was and is the only One who was worthy to take the scroll and break its seals (Rev. 5). This bloodied Sacrifice now rules the world, and He directs every aspect of it so that His salvific work is made known.

His legs are like pillars of fire astride the whole earth (Rev. 10:1-3)²⁸, communicating the scope of His mission. This Second Person of the Trinity invites His fellow slaves—connected to Him through the application of His blood through baptismal splashing—to participate in the Father's desire: that not any be lost but that all come to the life of freedom beneath God's lordship under the Master.

Now here is the question: Why do you try to serve two masters? You may understand “you” as either singular, plural, or, most decidedly, both. You may understand this in your vocation, as father or mother, as pastor, or as the baptized priests of God. It most assuredly includes the local congregation as well as the whole collection of churches, called The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. You decide. I would guess there are enough divided hearts to go around.

Oh, how the church throughout the history of the world has markedly fallen into slavery to other masters, and not to Christ! The first example, of course, was the primal church made up of two members, Adam and Eve. She—and then her husband—thought it profitable for their existence—and believed it to be freedom—to eat the forbidden fruit; they would remain in their innocent state. They thought their action was identical with the Lord's and that He would not care. Luther writes that “every evil begins in the name of the Lord.”²⁹

How many a church has strayed in teaching or practice while assuring one and all that this is the Lord's Word and will? Luther expounds further, “This slyness and villainy of Satan is imitated by all the heretics. Under the appearance of something good they rob men of God and of His Word before their very eyes; and they fabricate for them another, new god, who exists nowhere.”³⁰

One should not be surprised that God's slaves oftentimes begin their fall into idolatry through a corrupted Word. “The source of all sin truly is unbelief and doubt and abandonment of the Word,” says Luther.³¹ And thus, you have the Lord Himself riveting Joshua's focus for his mission work to the written word in Joshua 1:8. “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that

²⁷ Kurt Marquart, “Reformation Roots...”, p. 123.

²⁸ I take the mighty angel's identity of Revelation 10 as possibly Christ.

²⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Lectures on Genesis, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), p. 147.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 148.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 149.

you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.” God’s spoken Word had become His written Word, and now this was to be the church’s sword to conquer the unbelievers in Canaan and rescue the Rahabs from idolatry.

The heart of the Lord’s sword is the messianic promise in Genesis 3:15. Christ is the center of the Torah, and He would be the One who would crush the serpent’s head, even as He would be crushed in doing so. Through faith in this promised Seed, sinners would be declared righteous, even as Abraham believed and “he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). Israel’s tool to conquer the pagan nations, bringing them to repentance, and if not, to destroy them, was the Lord’s living voice in the Torah.

With the Word pressed upon the very identity of Israel, and through the Psalms the Spirit preaches and pushes the Israelites to place themselves continually in the green pastures and drink of the living water—remain in Christ, in other words, the Torah—it is surprising that the time comes when Israel actually loses the Bible. King Josiah holds a trustee workday at the Temple, and lo and behold, what do the workers find? “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD,” the high priest exclaims to Shaphan the secretary (2 Kings 22:8). God’s people actually lost the Bible! They had lost it already way before this. King after king, priest after priest, no longer believed in their Master’s will and Word.

Can you imagine going on a tour of God’s Temple and not seeing the true worship of Yahweh going on? That’s what Ezekiel saw as the Spirit grabbed him by a lock of hair and took him on a Temple tour as recorded in Ezekiel 8. Beginning at the entrance of the court and then in diminishing concentric circles, idolatrous worship is revealed in one after another instance. Finally, at the doorway to the Holy of Holies, “were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshipping the sun” (Ezek. 8:16)!

Sinful, cultic aberrations have abounded in the church ever since the beginning of her existence, and these abominations come in many forms. The ultimate abomination is the church’s failure to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ—a fully threatening Law and a soul-sweet Gospel—according to the Lord’s institution. Any dilution of the Lord’s Word is a subtle shift away from the reality that the Lord is Lord, the Master of His church.

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt. 6:24). God’s clarion call to repentance has been as consistent as His slaves’ idolatrous ways.

How can the church—the pastors and priesthood of all believers—execute the will of the Master when she serves two masters? How can the church be salt and light in a dark world while acting as if it is *possible* to be a slave to Christ and to the gods of this world?

And, it should come as no surprise that as the slave’s love for his Master cools, so does the execution of the Master’s will that none should be lost. Once faith weakens by a

double-minded church, she becomes “like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6), “carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14) or the seductive sirens of the culture. If the church of the unbelievers—whatever the heretical form—is absolutely powerless to fight sin and God’s church is rudderless, what good is the church for the world? “If the salt has lost its taste, it is no longer good for anything” (Matt. 5:13). The church is not good for her Master or for the lost. The unbelievers do not have the auditory equipment to discern dissonant gospels from the alone-saving song of the Master.

After the embattled years of Missouri’s dance with the Higher-Critical Method of Interpretation and finally its ending, many thought the church was safe. Another dance partner arose in that of non-denominational theology. The attraction is the common confession of inerrancy and inspiration. Many a Lutheran drinks at the well of non-denominational teaching all the while forsaking the Spirit’s application of justification through baptismal splashing and His biblical teachings of His monergistic activity in conversion and the decidedly weighted bias toward the same Spirit in sanctification.³²

Lutherans understand that God’s instrument of conversion is through the means of grace. This is where all the eggs are to be placed into one basket. This does not mean the sciences beneath the First Article cannot be used, but they are always subservient to the reign of the Word. Since God is consistent throughout history in how He communicates to His church through His Word, and this Word is enlivening—including the visible Word—then the church understands inerrancy as not the Word’s primary purpose. The primary function of God’s Word is to save, as is the primary will of the Master. The slave dare not change the Master’s will as he executes the contract!

If the Word’s purpose of saving is lost, then its only function is source of knowledge. The Bible’s pages are pored over in order to find principles to follow in order to be a more obedient slave. Sermons are preached, and books are written, as if faith and the person’s willpower are able to follow a certain program for success, namely, to become more holy. This becomes the Word’s primary purpose. “The way that contemporary American Protestantism reads the Bible is primarily as a source of self-understanding and personal enlightenment. It is Bible-reading as spiritual therapy,” David Adams writes.³³

Where is the objectivity of the Gospel? Where is the God who comes outside of the sinner and works on and in the sinner through His Word so as to eliminate any kind of self-help solutions? All we need is a church offering a plan for self-help therapy! God’s called and ordained slaves whose sermons ring with prophetic tones of threats and promises—with the promises always the overriding theme—do not find a receptive ear

³² Tappert, SD, Art. II, par. 66, p. 534, “But if this were to be understood as though the converted man cooperates alongside the Holy Spirit, the way two horses draw a wagon together, such a view could by no means be conceded without detriment to the divine truth.”

³³ See David Adams, “Evangelical Lutheranism or Lutheran Evangelicalism,” in *Teach These Things: Essay in Honor of Wallace Schulz*, eds Erik Rottmann with Brian Chisamore and Daniel Mackey. (Versailles: Wild Boar Books, 2008), p. 106.

even in many Missouri pews. If the results of numbers don't come, how many a preacher—and denomination—is tempted to change the message.

As much as Missouri applauds the common confessions of the sanctity of life, a six-day creation, and marriage between one man and one woman, she must not change the Master's primary will for the church and the world, God justifying the ungodly. If a greater morality is the ultimate purpose of the Master, then that is no different from the devil's church of slaves who preach morality.

And, this is most important: how do the slaves to sin—the unbelievers—recognize any difference between God's slave and the devil's? If both churches—Jesus and the devil's—promote an improved morality as the primary purpose and the ultimate end, then the unbelievers will join the cults and heretical groups before they gravitate to the Lord's church. The natural law written on every person's heart resonates to morality, not to the alien message of the Gospel.

Christ's church, His slaves, must ever remain faithful to the keeping and transmission of God's Word. As she does so, she will stick out like a sore thumb in this culture, and thereby, offer a decidedly different alternative to those messages that entice and promise the world, but never deliver the peace that passes all understanding.

The Rocky Mountain District Board of Directors adopted the mission statement, *Igniting Church and Culture for Christ!* Now I know that mission statements don't necessarily find receptivity within some circles. I would agree, if the message does not resonate with the Lord's voice. The statement not only must be supportive but also be didactic so as to direct the church to execute the Master's will.

Igniting of course was chosen to be thematically consistent with the Synod's *Ablaze!* The word *Igniting*—I believe—is quite wonderful. God, who created all the elements, never chose ice but rather fire to represent Himself. Fire either consumes or purifies; God's Word either kills or makes alive. Fire is not static but ever spreads out.

Jesus is the “very flame of the LORD [Yah(weh)]” (Song of Solomon 8:6c), the very presence of God, who even now is in the midst of His people igniting His slaves by the Spirit and the Word to believe, work, love, and proclaim. As He led the people of Israel by a pillar of fire in the Old Testament (Exodus 13:21), as He revealed His saving presence by fire at the dedication of Solomon's Temple (2 Chronicles 7:1-3), and as He revealed His enlivening presence through tongues of heavenly fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3), He now kindles—and must kindle—His slaves to keep believing in the Master's kindness and then executing the Master's will to reach out to the lost.

The church either falls off the road into the ditch on the one side, or falls into the ditch on the other. Unholy living and teaching do nothing but dilute the church's witness to herself and to the unbelievers. The church is continually being a faithful and unfaithful slave at the same time.

2. Life as God's Slave – Accountable to the Master's Will

Slaves are accountable to their master. How could they not be? Their total existence, identity, and purpose are aligned to their master. Is it coincidental that many of the parables Jesus preaches involve slave language? Is it not quite interesting that slave identity is used for both the pastoral office and the church as a whole?

God's slaves are accountable to the Master, Jesus. For what are they accountable? To execute the Master's will. What is the Master's will? The Lord loves sinners and desires them to remain in Him and to be re-claimed from the snatches of the devil. And thus, throughout Scripture, one must put on Jesus' glasses. Look at the Word and the world with divine optics.

I'm not going to mention other than in passing the obvious *sedes doctrinae* for God's will of saving sinners from God's seeking Adam and Eve in the Garden to the Old Testament's great commission given to and through Abraham where he would be the father of many nations. Consider as well Isaiah's prophetic word of Jesus—and Israel—to be a "light for the nations" (Is. 49:6). Note in particular Ezekiel's recording of Yahweh's lamentation against the shepherds who did not seek the lost. "The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them" (Ezek. 34:4).

Because of Israel's unfaithfulness—the nations as well as the priesthood—God pledges that He Himself will "seek the lost" and "bring back the strayed ... and bind up the injured ... I will feed them in justice," Yahweh states (Ezek. 34:16). God will bring His elect home with or without His slaves. His wish that none be lost will be accomplished one way or another, but He desires first and foremost to call the elect through His church.

It's clear though what the Master's will is: to keep His slaves bound to Him through baptismal chaining as He uses the very same slaves to seek the lost. "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold," Jesus preaches in John 10:16.

In light of the Master's expressed will, then place upon your eyes the Master's lens. When He invades unholy ground in Samaria north and east of Jerusalem and approaches the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4, is this wayward woman the only person He has in mind to convert? Is it not also the village people of Sychar? Jesus as the slave executing His Father's wishes is seeking the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans in Sychar. John uses the word *dei* (must) both here in John 4 and Luke 19 with the Zacchaeus' account. *Dei* is the Spirit's descriptive word emphasizing the Father's pounding passion and divine necessity for Jesus to execute His mission.

Where are the eyes of the disciples looking in John 4? They had visited Sychar seeking only food for the body. When they return to the well, they do not see Jesus' conversation with any salvific intent. Do you and I really believe they saw what Jesus saw, mission opportunities galore at the well and in the town? "Dear Master, look at all the mission

opportunities! There are more unbelievers around here than you can shake a stick at! Let's forego supper, Master, and get to work!"

An old African American spiritual dauntingly challenges and lovingly invites every Holy Week attendee to repentance with these words, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" The words continue, "Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Were you there at Jacob's well, and did such misunderstanding cause a holy trembling for not seeing what Jesus saw?

How many a church has the same eyes as did Jesus' disciples at the well? Do you? Does the church you serve see the making of the budget as the ultimate goal for the year? Does the church you serve see itself as heaven's beachhead on earth, fighting against the enclaves of darkness with the laser-like weaponry of light, snatching out of the fires of hell those who are lost? Are your circuit meetings and voters' meetings more about buying bread and being close to the Master than seeing the opportunities all around? Do you conduct your ministry in such a way that, as the disciples, you are with Jesus but your eyes don't go where His eyes go? Give ear to your Master's words. "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (John 4:35).

Consider with me then Jesus' teaching through His parables. What does the Lord have in mind when He states in Luke 19:13, "Engage in business until I come"? He addresses ten of His "servants" (v. 13). And He calls them to accountability. "He ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business" (v. 15).

Usually we interpret these passages referring to all the gifts Christ has given to the individual Christian. And most certainly, we would interpret the gifts given as the mysteries of the kingdom, the Word, and the Sacraments. How has and is God's slave—the church—using His gifts?

What we assume, though, is this: How has God's church used the Master's gifts toward His own church? Has the pastor been faithful in keeping the Lord's Word untainted for His flock? At his ordination we ask the pastor to pledge his faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures and to the Confessions so that all that he does is consistent with them. We ask the pastor whether he will adorn this office with a holy life and will he instruct both the old and young with the chief articles of the Christian faith. We don't ask him whether he will be faithful in directing the Master's slaves to execute His will: to seek and to save the lost.³⁴

I purposely chose the parable of the Ten Minas and Jesus' words to do "business until I come" because of its context: Jesus' seeking Zacchaeus. The last verse of the Zacchaeus' text reads this way, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (19:10). Jesus seeks a lost person, states that seeking the lost is the reason for His coming, and then He preaches a parable on accountability for His slaves. To what is Jesus holding His slaves

³⁴ For a more expansive discussion of accountability, see Robert Newton's unpublished paper entitled "Accountability and Faithfulness in Reaching the Lost."

accountable? To what would be the accountability? Would it not be to be exegetically faithful to this parable that Jesus is asking for His slaves' accountability to seek and to save the lost?

To whom then is Jesus preaching? Is it not to His disciples? Is it not even to the institutionalized church of the day, the Scribes and Pharisees, whose continual complaint is His eating with tax collectors and sinners? The Pharisees were balking at the Lord's mission of mercy just like Jonah! Are not Jesus' words, which express His divine execution of the Father's will, addressing the church of all time? What then is your accountability to your Master? What do you say to the Master whose particular interest concerns the lost?

Now again, let's remind ourselves of the first century understanding of a slave. A slave is a non-person whose total identity, existence, and desire are bound up with his master. The master's wishes are the slave's; it would be unthinkable for a loyal slave to desire anything apart from the master's desires. To do so would be rebellion against the master's expressed will. That is how Jesus sees the church's misuse of His mysteries, whether the church distorts or even hides them in a handkerchief as did the unfaithful slave expressed in Luke 19:20.

Key to the slave's obedience is his view of the Master. Does he view Him harshly, as exacting an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? Does he believe him to be gracious and merciful—not only to him but to the Ninevites as well—and does the slave understand the very fact that his Master privileged the entire operation of His Kingdom's preservation and extension to him as gift and opportunity? The difference is as stark as the night is from the day, as the Law is from the Gospel.

Christ's mission is the church's mission, and therefore, this privilege of mission is seen as pure gift, as a result of being one in identity and purpose with the Master. Oh, dear brothers, if mission is presented any other way, as some kind of burdensome duty or heavy obligation, then it is all wrong. No slave who has been set free from the bondage of sin to freedom in Christ ever sees the Master's directives as dreary obligation.

The slave who is enslaved wholly to his Master, Jesus, does not have a second thought of being faithful in seeking the lost. It is his indicative nature, as it was for the Samaritan woman to whom Jesus did not even tell her to go to her neighbors in Sychar. Her new Adam wanted to do what every new Adam does, tell of Jesus to those in close proximity, whether they are fellow slaves of righteousness or slaves to sin.

Luther's description of the church as God's "Mouthhouse" must not be confined within the church walls alone. A freed slave who is bound to his new Master just tells it like it is to every one. There is no hesitation because of a lack of self-righteousness. Fully clothed in Jesus' garments, the slaves simply express the freedom that is theirs to whoever is within earshot.

Then there is Jonah; the Lord had to commission him twice. He sent wind, storm, and the big fish to get His mission done. Even after that, the Lord used a plant, the desert wind, and a worm to try to get Jonah to view the Ninevites through divine optics.

Accountability, God's slaves in the Missouri Synod by God's grace are good at measuring faithfulness in holding to the Master's Word. It appears to me that we're entering new ground if we venture into the area of accountability to the lost within the parameters of the local parish. How do we do this? What are the metrics? What measures should be used that don't infringe upon the Lord's teaching that He brings about the growth, whether that be ten or five minas from the one mina given by the Master?

Paul's qualifications for the pastoral office listed in Timothy and Titus do not include, for example, a heart for seeking the lost. He does tell Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:7 that those who aspire to the office of overseer "must be well thought of by outsiders."

An interesting verse is in Paul's second letter to Timothy (2:24-26) where he exhorts "the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome" in his correcting of his opponents. These words are in the text. "Correcting his opponents with gentleness, God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will." Now, whether the one needing repentance is a misguided believer or one who was once a believer, it's not clear. If it does include an apostate, then this would be a reference to seeking the lost as the Lord's slave defends the faith. The Lord sought Judas even to the very night of his hanging. Let us imitate Him.

Can you imagine a Missouri Synod church in which the number of infant baptisms is matched, if not exceeded, by the number of adult baptisms? It seems to me that when that begins to happen in a church, the "measures" of increase indicate a priesthood of all believers that is engaging others actively in their vocational calling. Even here though one must work not only with the belief that the Lord desires more sheep but that He is the One who gives the increase.

Here is a Bible verse that indicates accountability. "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God," states Peter in 1 Peter 4:17. Judgment for what? Right use of His doctrine? Surely. Participating in His mission to the lost. Most definitely. Could it be that the Lord's continual litany of calls for the church to repent is not only to reclaim the saved but to keep the church in Him as He uses her to reach the lost?

Judgment is for the church's stewardship of the application of His doctrine not only for those within the church but also upon those whom God already owned by His death and resurrection but are yet to come to faith. The world of unbelievers is the church's inheritance, the seeds of Abraham to whom God holds the church accountable, and to whom God has given "the promise to Abraham and his offspring" (Romans 4:13). They are the "offering of the Gentiles" (Romans 15:16) made by the church to the Lord. They are the Israelites yet to be circumcised in the heart by the Word that justifies, those for whom—like Paul—would sacrifice salvation itself for their conversion (Romans 9:3).

The church does not sort the elect from those who are yet to believe,³⁵ but she simply proclaims the Christ and treats *every* person as part of the world reconciled by the Son (2 Cor. 5:19).

Let me clarify the exegesis of 1 Peter 4:17. God’s judgment, simply put, is on His church when she begins to fall away to other gods. The church exhibits this apostasy by her poor stewardship of God’s doctrine for its express purpose, to “save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16). God in love ever calls His church to repent whenever she fails to use His doctrine rightly and falls into the lap of other gods.

Peter’s reference to the “household of God” in 1 Peter 4:17 must have called to the mind of the hearer the time when God took away Ezekiel’s wife, the “delight of your eyes” (Ezekiel 24:16), as an action-prophecy prophetic of what God would do to Israel’s “delight of their eyes” (Ezek. 24:24-27), the Temple. If the Lord killed the prophet’s wife by that evening after he preached in the morning, what about you, O household of God? And surely they had to recall by the Spirit’s reminder even the Lord’s two temple-cleansings (John 2:13-22; Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46).

Israel lusted to be like the other nations, building images of God and desiring a king to rule. “Like greed, lust in effect establishes another ‘god’ in violation of the First Commandment.”³⁶ Churches today lust after others which are growing or the seemingly dynamic churches full of hustle and bustle. Every church must, of course, continually examine every work and operation within so that it does not hinder the proclamation of the Word within and without the church walls. Woe to any church or denomination that desires to be like others while willing to compromise God’s doctrine. And woe to any church that fails to use God’s doctrine for the Master’s express purpose, to save “both yourself and your hearers.” “Hearers” has no qualifier as to their location. “Hide it under a bushel basket. No! I’m going to let it shine!” so goes the little song.

This is clear: God’s intent is the seeking of the lost. He uses His slaves to execute His express will. God’s church throughout the ages oftentimes has been His biggest headache. His slaves continually rebelled in unfaithfulness with His mysteries or by misapplying His mysteries only to fellow slaves.

Conclusion: The Master’s Work will be done.

God dealt with that young man who had little concern for the couple’s salvation back in North Platte, Nebraska. The Spirit worked repentance for not having a care whether that couple would go to hell or not. He continually works on His slave so that his eyes see

³⁵ I am not speaking against God’s office of the keys’ directive of church discipline upon those who are unrepentant. And I do not disparage at all the biblical teaching of Close(d) Communion where people are withheld from the Lord’s divine presence at the rail due to their confessed disagreement—by lip or life—by the altar to which they are pledged (Matt. 23:20-21) that has teaching against the Lord’s teaching (see Rom. 16:17).

³⁶ Horace Hummel, *Ezekiel*, Concordia Commentary. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), p. 749.

what He sees, and daily enjoins His slave's identity, existence, and passion to the Master's.

Only the great, merciful, and almighty God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, could ever affect His mission through such a weak group of slaves as He has. Yet He does. He reprimands, admonishes, encourages, scolds, invites, and continually bears His stigmata before their eyes in every Divine Service, reminding and affecting in them their blood-bought bondage. He sends called slaves to His other slaves—the priesthood of all believers—so that His Word might enliven and set tongues free, both for praising and forthtelling. As with the Israelites of old, He even precedes His slaves into the world, leading them in His mission.

It is how it is. God simply loves to justify the ungodly. His justifying is the centering focus as it at the same time drives the margins. His passion causes His church to be as passionate as the Father. This is how it is, and it is pure and unadulterated joy, privilege, and gift for His church, the pastors and the priesthood of all believers!

I close with these words from a well-known hymn.

Rise, shine, you people! Christ the Lord has entered
Our human story; God in Him is centered,
He comes to us, by death and sin surrounded,
With grace unbounded

Tell how the Father sent His Son to save us,
Tell of the Son, who life and freedom gave us.
Tell how the Spirit calls from every nation
His new creation.³⁷

³⁷ Lutheran Service Book, "Rise, Shine, You People," (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), hymn 825 verses 1 and 4.