The Theology of Glory and The Theology of the Cross
in Luther’s *Postils*

By

John Yan Yee Chan

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Trinity College
and the Theological Department of the Toronto School of Theology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology
awarded by Trinity College and the University of Toronto

© Copyright by John Yan Yee Chan 2017
The Theology of Glory and The Theology of the Cross in Luther’s Postils

John Yan Yee Chan

Doctor of Theology

Trinity College and the University of Toronto

2017

Abstract

In the past two decades the work of Jürgen Moltmann and Douglas John Hall has stimulated numerous studies on the theology of the cross. These studies can be divided into four categories: (1) exegetical and historical; (2) critiques of theologies of glory; (3) challenges to the abuse of power; and (4) signs of the coming of God’s kingdom. While areas of research suggested in these studies invite exploration and amplification, this study focuses solely on Martin Luther’s theology of the cross as exemplified in his Postil.

Many Luther scholars contend that the theology of the cross characterizes Luther’s entire theology: not merely one topic among many, it functions as the point of reference for all theological discussions even as it integrates the multi-dimensionality of Luther’s corpus.

Luther’s sermons, his Postils, an important yet under-attended part of his written output, have yet to be investigated from the standpoint of Luther’s regulative principle his theologia crucis. With this in mind, this thesis will identify, expose, and expound both explicit and implicit material pertaining to Luther’s understanding of the theology of glory and the theology of the cross in his Postils. The thesis will argue that Luther considers theologia crucis to be practical and that the theology of the cross is the basis of Luther’s ethical teachings in the Postils.
In order to achieve the above purpose, the thesis will discuss the theology of the cross in terms of the *Postils’* references to such issues of discipleship and ethics as, for instance, vocation, civil obedience, and love of the neighbour.
Acknowledgments

This thesis would not be possible without my thesis director Dr. Victor Shepherd. Dr. Shepherd’s lectures spawned my interest in theology in general and the theology of the Reformers in particular. He is the thesis director of both my Th.M. thesis on Calvin and my Th.D. thesis on Luther. Conversations with Dr. Shepherd in his living room shaped the direction and content of this thesis.

I would like to thank Dr. David Neelands for guiding me through the re-shaping of this thesis. Valuable advices as well as encouragements from Dr. Neelands made the second and final draft possible.

Last but not least, heartfelt thanks to my dear wife Ruth who encouraged me through my ten-year doctoral studies. Thanks for enduring the countless eight-hour round-trip train rides from Göttingen to Hamburg on which this thesis was written!
# Table of Contents

1. Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
2. Chapter 2: The theology of the cross is a theology of revelation ........................................ 26
3. Chapter 3: The Soteriology of the Cross .......................................................................... 56
4. Chapter 4: The Ethics of the Cross .................................................................................. 79
5. Chapter 5: Cross-bearing and the Cost of Discipleship .................................................... 120
6. Chapter 6: The Christian living between the Two Kingdoms ........................................... 141
7. Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 191
8. Bibliography ................................................................................................................... 194
Chapter 1
Introduction

This thesis focuses on a theology of the cross as it appears in Luther’s Postils. Postils are model sermons written for use by preachers of the time. They are source material for preaching to a wider audience. Many monographs and articles have been written on Luther’s theology of the cross based on his theological tracts and commentaries on Scripture, but none so far has been written about his theology of the cross in the Postils.¹ It would be beneficial to explore Luther’s Postils in order to discover how Luther applies the theology of the cross in everyday-life Christian ethics.

Introduction to the theological discussions regarding the theology of the cross

In a recent article “‘Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory’: New Vistas for the Theology of the Cross”, Craig Nessan surveyed fifteen books written since 1970 on the theology of the cross. He maintains that the recent interest in the theology of the cross began with the writings of Jürgen Moltmann and Douglas John Hall in the 1970s. This concern coincides with the onset of liberation theology, placing the theology of the cross in the context of a theology of human suffering and injustice. Moltmann attempted to answer the question, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” by reintroducing Christ as the crucified God, who comes into the world to suffer with the sufferers and to liberate them through his cross.

Moltmann proposed that the theology of the cross is the gospel (good news) offered by the crucified Christ to liberate humankind from sin and suffering. The cross signifies God’s willingness to suffer with those who suffer and God’s rejection of human pride, power and domination. It signifies God’s choosing of the lowly over the mighty, the weak over the strong,

¹ We shall demonstrate later in this chapter that the substance of theology of the cross is indeed present in the Postils, since that has been doubted.
the poor over the rich and the self-acknowledged sinner over the self-righteous. The theology of the cross is a theology which liberates the “wretched and their rulers.”

Since Moltmann, there are a variety of studies on the theology of the cross, which studies Nessan divides into four categories: (1) exegetical and historical; (2) critiques of theologies of glory; (3) challenges to the abuse of power; and (4) signals of the coming of God’s kingdom.

Nessan locates Charles B. Cousar’s A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters, Alister McGrath’s Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theological Breakthrough, and Philip Ruge-Jones’ Cross in Tensions: Luther’s Theology of the Cross as Theologico-social Critique in the exegetical and historical category. Cousar’s book looks into Paul’s theology of the cross from the Scriptures, while McGrath and Ruge-Jones focus on Luther’s own theology of the cross. One could also put Walther Von Loewenich’s Luther’s Theology of the Cross into this category.

In the second category, critiques of a theology of glory, Nessan introduces Gerhard O. Forde’s masterpiece On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518, Ruge-Jones’ second book The Word of the Cross in a World of Glory and Vitor Westhelle’s The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross. Forde’s book expounds Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation thesis by thesis and is a succinct summary of Luther’s differentiation of theologians of the cross from theologians of glory. Ruge-Jones attempts to apply the theologia crucis in the contemporary context, critiquing the need for power and

---

3 Craig Nessan, “‘Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory’: New Vistas for the Theology of the Cross,” Dialog 50 (2011), 81.
control. Westhelle focuses on the scandalous nature of the cross and emphasizes the purpose and necessity of Christian suffering and *Anfechtung*.

In the third category, challenges to the abuses of power, Nessan lists Winston D. Persaud’s *The Theology of the Cross and Marx’s Anthropology: A View from the Caribbean*, Mary Solberg’s *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross*, Deanna A. Thompson’s *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* and Theodore Jennings’ *Transforming Atonement: A Political Theology of the Cross*. These monographs engage the theology of the cross with various contemporary social issues such as economic exploitation, feminism, and liberation theology, and are characterized by their economic and political emphasis.

In the last category, signals of the coming of God’s kingdom, Nessan includes Douglas John Hall’s *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*, David A. Brondos’ *Fortress Introduction to Salvation and the Cross*, Mark W. Thomsen’s *Christ Crucified: A 21st Century Missiology of the Cross*, and John D. Caputo’s *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Hall stresses that the cross is God entering into the world’s suffering, and that all Christians are called to participate in God’s suffering in the world as a sign of the coming of God’s kingdom. Brondos concludes, after surveying atonement theology through the ages, that Jesus’ death is paradigmatic for a way of life that redeems through suffering and liberation. While Brondos’ research is historical, Thomsen applies the same conclusions to present-day missiology. The cross reveals God’s solidarity with all those who suffer and God’s mission to liberate all from evil. Lastly, John Caputo posits that God is not a Being but an Event. Therefore,
a theology of the cross should not consist in mere theories of solidarity and liberation, but in acts. He insists that “making truth happy...is what constitutes membership in the kingdom.”

While the vistas of research into the theology of the cross are wide open to those who are interested, this study will focus only on the theological teachings of Martin Luther on the theology of the cross as expounded in his Postils.

**Luther’s theology of the cross**

The Heidelberg Disputation, which took place in April 1518, was Luther’s first opportunity to present his systematic thought on the evangelical faith after posting the *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517. The Heidelberg Disputation took place during the triennial general chapter of the Augustinians of Germany. Luther prepared the main elements of his “new theology” at the behest of Johann von Staupitz, vicar of the German congregation of the order. Luther presented his theses and was debated by fellow Augustinian Leonhard Beier. Luther prepared the twenty-eight theological and twelve philosophical theses (*conclusiones*) for the Heidelberg Disputation before the debate. He also wrote proofs (*probationes*) for the theological theses.

While the Disputation was not widely known at the time, it did succeed in attracting the younger theologians within the order. No fewer than six future Reformers, including leaders such as Martin Bucer and Johannes Brenz, were in attendance at the Disputation; they were impressed by Luther’s arguments there and in due course became disciples of Luther and champions of the Reformation. The Disputation was Luther’s first opportunity to present his systematic thought.

---

on the evangelical faith and it has been identified as the main elements of what modern theologians call Luther’s theology of the cross.⁷

Luther himself seldom used the exact terms “theology of the cross” and “theology of glory”.⁸ But modern theologians have identified the main elements of the theology of the cross in particular theses of the Disputation.⁹ Since Luther’s formulation of the theology of the cross is the starting point of discussion for most scholars in this field, we will first give a brief summary of the theses.

Theses 1–18 and 23–24 of the Disputation deal with the Law. Luther maintains that the Law serves a purpose which is alien to God’s nature, but which purpose in turn effect an outcome belonging to his proper nature. The Law makes us aware of our sin. It makes known that even the seemingly “good” work we do is mortal sin. The sinner is driven by the Law to forsake any hope in human means of salvation, whereupon he may be driven by desperation to place his hope solely in Christ and his grace. Thesis upon thesis develops this theme, showing the futility of the sinner’s attempt to justify himself through works, until finally he realizes the folly of this pursuit and throws himself on the mercy of God. Then the turning point in thesis 25: “He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.” Here the Gospel is introduced: the sinner does not become righteous through works, but through faith in Christ. Theses 25 and 26 articulate steps in the sinner’s awareness of the proper work of God, which is justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

---

⁸ The term “theology of the cross” used once in thesis 24 and “theology of glory” used once in the proof of thesis 20. In thesis 21, Luther used the terms “theologian of glory” and “theologian of the cross”.
⁹ McGrath, 148.
Though much of the Disputation deals with soteriology and all of the theses relating to this, the key to the Disputation and to Luther’s theologia crucis lies in four theses in the middle. Theses 19–22 outline the theology of the cross and its effect on epistemology. How do we know that no amount of human effort leads to salvation? How do we know that the Law is designed to bring sinners to a knowledge of their sinnership? How do we know that the Gospel is justification by grace through faith in Christ? The answer lies in the cross.

The theology of the cross is a theology of revelation. This revelation is a revelation of God himself. God does not reveal “truths” about himself, he reveals himself: God is both the subject and the object of revelation. Luther maintains that God reveals himself through the “visible and manifest things of God”; namely, suffering and the cross. The Latin word Luther uses which is mistranslated as “manifest” is posterior, which means “back” or “hindmost”; in other words, God has chosen to reveal his “backside”. The cross of Christ is the “backside” of God, says Luther; it is an indirect revelation that can be apprehended only by faith. The content of this revelation includes the above-mentioned dialectic between Law and Gospel.

Lastly, in theses 27–28, Luther expounds the ethics of the cross. If salvation is through faith and not works, does this mean that we no longer need to do good works? The answer is that we do not need to do good works in order to earn salvation; however, good works are an expression of our love for the neighbour. Just as Christ loves us and gave himself for us, we are moved by his love to love others. The Scriptures also exhort us to imitate Christ and his love. All we do for others we do for the sake of love. Luther ends with thesis 28: “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that

---

10 Alister McGrath translates thesis 20 literally as “The man who perceives the visible rearward parts of God as seen in suffering and the cross does, however, deserve to be called a theologian.” McGrath, Luther’s Theology of the Cross, 148. See also Forde, On Being a Theologian of the Cross, 78.
which is pleasing to it.”¹¹ It is not the case that God loves us because we are lovable; rather, it is because God loves us that we are defined as lovable. This is demonstrated on the cross, where Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

Gerhard O. Forde in his treatise on the Heidelberg Disputation, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, describes the structure of the Disputation as a great arch stretching between two pillars. The first pillar is the Law of God and the second pillar is the love of God. The Disputation moves from the Law of God to the love of God and the theology of the cross is the arch which brings sinful human beings from the Law of God to the love of God.¹² The cross is “in the first instance God’s attack on human sin,” while in the second instance, it is “salvation from sin.”¹³ So in Forde’s view, the emphasis of the Disputation is on soteriology, how sinful human beings are justified by the grace of God. The soteriology of the cross is not a salvation by works but a salvation by grace through faith. But in order to establish a soteriology of the cross, Luther must first establish the epistemology of the cross.

Von Loewenich notes that “in every case the attempt is made to reach the knowledge of God by way of creation.”¹⁴ However, the cross rejects this approach to God. True theology, the theology of the cross is a theology of revelation. This revelation is an indirect revelation, a revelation through suffering and the cross. He summarizes the epistemology of the *theologia crucis* as follows:

---


¹³ Ibid, 1.

¹⁴ Von Loewenich, 19.
1. The *theologia crucis* is a theology of revelation.

2. This revelation must be regarded as indirect and concealed.

3. This revelation is to be recognized in the sufferings and cross of Christ, rather than in human moral activity or the created order.

4. This knowledge of God who is hidden in his revelation is a matter of faith.

5. God is known particularly through suffering.\(^{15}\)

While the arguments in the Heidelberg Disputation emphasized the epistemology and the soteriology of the cross, Luther’s understanding of *theologia crucis* is not limited to these two topics. Von Loewenich states in his monograph on Luther’s theology of the cross that “for Luther the cross is not only the subject of theology; it is the distinctive mark of all theology” and integrates all of Christian knowledge.\(^{16}\) It is not a chapter or subsection of theology; it is “the center that provides perspective for all theological statements.”\(^{17}\) In other words, it is not just that the theology of the cross is relevant to certain other theological topics; rather, it is the point of reference for *all* theological discussions and for the integration of Luther’s many-faceted theology. Indeed, it characterizes Luther’s entire theological thinking.\(^{18}\)

Paul Althaus states that the key to the theology of the cross is the hiddenness of God under the cross (*Deus absconditus*). The cross conceals God and therefore “marks the end of all speculation about God on the part of self-confident reason.”\(^{19}\) The hiddenness of God under the cross means that all realities are hidden to reason. Human beings cannot gain access to true reality through reason; the cross brings in a new understanding of reality. This reality, the reality

\(^{15}\) Ibid, 22.
\(^{16}\) Ibid, 17–18.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid, 13.
of God and of his salvation, is “paradoxical and hidden under its opposite.” It can only be revealed through the cross. In light of this hiddenness of God, Althaus states that “all true theology is ‘wisdom of the cross.’ This means that the cross of Christ is the standard by which all genuine theological knowledge is measured,” the cross is the test of all things (crux probat omnia). It is the lens by which true reality is revealed. This includes “the reality of God, of his grace, of his salvation, of the Christian life, or of the church of Christ.”

Even though Althaus devoted only one part of a chapter to the direct discussion about the theology of the cross, he insists, like von Loewenich, that the theology of the cross “permeates all of Luther's theological thinking.” It is significant that he places the discussion on the theology of the cross under the heading “The Knowledge of God, the Word and Faith”. The theology of the cross is the interpretive key to all knowledge of God, the Word and Faith. It is the key to Christian epistemology. Althaus points out that the theology of the cross, with its emphasis on the hiddenness of God, determines Luther's view of Christ’s kingdom, of the church and of justification.

Christ's kingdom is hidden because it cannot be recognized through God's children or the visible institution of the church. The Christian is justified not by visible works. On the contrary, she has no works good enough to earn salvation. She is justified despite this lack of works. To the eyes of the world, she is a wretched sinner. Her Christian identity is hidden to the world and even to herself. Her justification and her true identity as the child of God are not visible to the senses or to rational thought. It is only visible to the eyes of faith. Similarly, the historical institution of the church, so far from being the model of perfection on earth which reason expects, is filled with errors, sins, divisions and heresies. Human reason is offended by this

---

20 Ibid, 30-32.
church. It is condemned and despised by the world. Its identity as the true church of God is hidden to sight and open only to faith.

Many contemporary theologians point to a need to investigate whether the theology of the cross speaks to today’s situation. Is it practical? Is it contextual? Is it possible to speak of an ethics of the cross?

Von Loewenich posed the critical question whether theologia crucis “remain[s] a theory about which one may speak profoundly but according to which it is impossible to live?”21 The theological arguments Luther made in the Heidelberg Disputation are profound, yet they seem to be remote from life. If it is remote from life, then it is incomplete and ultimately of no use to the Christian engaged in everyday life. Von Loewenich defends the theology of the cross and maintains that it is “eminently practical.” Indeed, it differs from the theology of glory precisely because it “leads a person out of his spectator stance and propels him into the decision of faith.” The cross cannot be understood until one experiences it in real life.22

Moltmann reasons along a similar trajectory and insists that the suffering and the cross of Christ could only be fully understood by “participation in his mission.” True faith is a call to follow Jesus, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it so bluntly: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”23 Moltmann also views Luther’s theologia crucis not as “a single chapter in theology, but the key signature for all Christian theology.”24 Moltmann emphasizes the critical and liberating nature of theologia crucis. Luther’s theology of the cross is formed as a critical theology against the medieval institutional church. The cross critiques a human pride which

---

21 Von Loewenich, 112.
24 Moltmann, 72.
searches for a direct knowledge of God. It critiques the human attempt to attain righteousness through works. Yet Moltmann laments that Luther did not go far enough, that he did not extend the theology of the cross to critique the socio-political system of his day. Moltmann criticizes Luther for exhorting the oppressed during the Peasant’s War to submit to their rulers. Moltmann maintains that Luther should have expressed “the critical and liberating force of the cross, the choosing of the lowly which puts the mighty to shame.”

Christians are called to follow Christ. This following is a response to Christ and is expressed through present-day actions. Since the cross expresses Christ’s mission to both identify and then liberate the poor, the wretched and the sinner, the follower of Christ must make it her own mission to do likewise. In the pursuit of this mission, one must take up one’s own cross just as Christ took up his. Bearing one’s own cross is to enter into the suffering of the sufferer and only in this way could one understand them fully. Christ emptied himself and became poor in order to liberate the poor. He became a sinner on the cross in order to liberate the sinner. It is only when the Christian imitates Christ and participates in his mission that she experiences and understands the poverty and sufferings of Christ. What are the suffering and cross of Christ and what are the sufferings and the cross of his followers? It is when the mission of the crucified Christ becomes a present-day reality for the Christian, that she fully understands the answer to that question.

Douglas John Hall takes up this theme of “what the cross means for us today.” He insists that “discipleship of the crucified Christ is characterized by a faith that drives its adherents into the world.” He states that Christianity is a missionary faith. Christians are sent out into the

---

25 Ibid.
world to carry out a mission. That mission is the mission of the crucified Christ to suffer with and also to liberate the lowly, poor, wretched sinner.

To Hall, the mission of the crucified Christ is characterized by the virtues faith, hope and love. However, since the theology of the cross according to Hall is a via negativa, the virtues are characterized by what they negate: faith (not sight), hope (not consummation), and love (not power).

Hall points to Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation in maintaining the hiddenness of God. God is hidden and is not visible to human reason or senses. We cannot “know” God in the way of intellectual assent. We can only “know” God through faith in the cross of Jesus Christ. That is, we trust Him. Faith therefore, negates sight. We do not have the certainty of God’s existence, of Christ’s resurrection according to reason and knowledge. We only apprehend God through faith and we trust in the resurrected Christ through faith.

Similarly, Christians’ hope for the consummation of our salvation is at the eschaton. It is not yet complete. The theologia crucis means that even our Christian life is hidden. No one can see our Christian life with the naked eye. Our Christian identity cannot be confirmed by reason or knowledge. We cannot stand on a moral high ground and claim to already be “saved”. The reality of our Christian life can only be confirmed at the eschaton. Therefore, we cling to God’s promise of salvation by faith. With this faith, we derive the hope of the consummation of that salvation at the eschaton.

Lastly, the cross reveals God’s definitive modus operandi: God does not rule by power but by love. His way of saving the world is through suffering and self-sacrifice. On the cross, Christ

27 Ibid, 33.
was made a victim, a sinner, a sacrifice in order to save human-kind. Therefore, suffering love must also be the bases of Christian ethics.\(^{28}\)

While Moltmann and Hall both stressed the importance of a \textit{praxis} of the cross and have both made their contributions to this discussion through their later works, it remains to be determined whether Luther, whose theology of the cross was the starting point of this discussion, had himself already developed a \textit{praxis} of the cross.

Von Loewenich attempts to argue for the position that Luther did indeed develop a \textit{praxis} of the cross.\(^{29}\) An entire chapter of his monograph \textit{Luther's Theology of the Cross} is devoted to Luther’s view of the Christian life under the cross. Von Loewenich explores the hiddenness of the Christian life, the bearing of the cross of the Christian and the virtues humility, trials (\textit{Anfechtungen}) and prayer in the process of cross-bearing.

Von Loewenich mapped out Luther’s \textit{praxis} of the cross in terms of the inward life: the hiddenness of the Christian life, bearing of the cross and the three virtues: humility, trials and prayer. However, he did not discuss the outward direction to which the cross directs the Christian. Does the cross propel the Christian out of himself and into the world as both Moltmann and Hall insist? Does the cross provide a socio-politico critique and liberate human beings from their social plight as well as from their spiritual predicament?

This paper will attempt to go beyond the Heidelberg Disputation to find the answer to the questions: Does Luther’s theology of the cross have a practical dimension? Did Luther have an “ethics” of the cross? While the \textit{Heidelberg Disputation} contains the most succinct expression of

\(^{28}\) Ibid, 193-197.

\(^{29}\) There are some scholarly disputes regarding whether the theology of the cross only applies to the early Luther. Von Loewenich's chapter on Life under the cross draws indeed mostly from the early Luther (1515-1522). He did have several references to Luther's \textit{Exposition on Psalms} (1529-1532), \textit{Lecture on Galatians} (1531) and \textit{Lecture on Genesis} 1535-1538). Later in the chapter, we will briefly discuss Gustaf Wingren's contention that the later Luther did not abandon \textit{theologia crucis}, but rather expressed \textit{theologia crucis} through his understanding of Vocation.
Luther’s theology of the cross, it is not the only place where this theology is found. Indeed, if the cross is central to Luther’s overall theology, one would expect to find expressions of his theologia crucis in all of his work. Luther’s sermons, his Postils in particular, constitute one important body of his writing that has yet to be explored fully by scholars. Luther’s Postils, which are model sermons to be used by preachers throughout Germany, should be able to shed light upon what Luther considers to be the rules of life for his congregants. This body of work provides us with an opportunity to assess whether the theology of the cross is applied by Luther to the everyday life of a Christian.

**Luther’s Sermons**

Luther’s sermons number in the thousands, over two thousand of which are available for research today. Most of them are in the form of homilies in which he explains Scripture verse by verse. Luther’s sermons, especially his Postils, were widely distributed and highly influential in the sixteenth century, if only because they were meant to function as model sermons for Lutheran pastors.

Elmer Kiessling, in his book *The Early Sermons of Luther and Their Relation to the Pre-Reformation Sermon*, maintains that Luther’s sermons reflect his deeply rooted personal religious convictions and experiences while at the same time retaining an objective Scriptural basis. Anyone reading them can attest to Luther’s personal convictions, and his rejection of works-righteousness can be traced to his own early struggles with personal guilt and the meaning of God’s righteousness. Yet one of Luther’s greatest contributions to the development of the sermon as a form, Kiessling insists, is that he made the sermon scriptural: his sermons are based

---

30 There are 2300 sermons listed by George Buchwald in volume XXII of the Weimar edition.
on Scripture and Scripture alone, unlike the standard approaches to Scripture before the 1520s.31 Because of the high value placed by Luther on the preached Word and its function in transforming the heart of the hearer – for Luther the gospel is the gospel preached – the sermon is perhaps the best window by which we can glimpse his theological convictions.

Regrettably, few researchers venture into the oceanic volumes of Luther’s sermons. According to Kiessling’s preface, his research was motivated by Luther historian James Mackinnon’s claim that no exhaustive treatise on Luther’s preaching was available at the time (1929). Kiessling subsequently devoted his master’s thesis (1935) to the research of Luther’s early sermons (1512–1522). While this notable book provides a wealth of background information on Luther’s preaching, it mentions his theology of the cross only in passing. A 1954 dissertation by Andrew Kosten of Temple University, The Pastoral Element in Luther’s Church Postils, is the only book-length research into Luther’s Postils. Its focus, however, is on the pastoral Luther rather than on his theologia crucis. Dennis Ngien’s Luther as a Spiritual Adviser: The Interface of Theology and Piety in Luther’s Devotional Writings (published in 2007) is the most recent monograph researching Luther’s sermons. While the book focuses, as the title suggests, on Luther’s spiritual advice to people in various situations, it uses several of his sermons as primary material. Ngien, who has also penned a book on Luther’s theology of the cross, explores Luther’s spiritual advice through the lens of theologia crucis, but his discussion is limited to the sermons in volume 42 of Luther’s Works and does not deal with the Postils. All of this leaves much room for further research into Luther’s Postils in order to ascertain whether the theology of the cross is reflected in them.

31 Elmer Carl Kiessling, The Early Sermons of Luther and Their Relation to the Pre-Reformation Sermon. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1935), 147. While Kiessling gives Luther the credit for making the sermon scriptural, he did concede that the Homilie, preaching through the Scripture verse by verse, predates Luther.
The Postils

Postil is the abbreviation of the Latin phrase *post illa verba textus*, meaning “an exposition after these words”, referring to Scripture readings. In other words, Postils were homilies preached after the Bible reading in a church service. After the fourteenth century, the term Postils came to denote an annual cycle of homilies.\(^{32}\) John Frymire, in his monograph *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany*, maintains that while Postils became synonymous with the Lutheran Reformation in the thinking of modern scholars, they predate Luther and were written by Catholics as well as by the Reformers.\(^{33}\)

With the advent of printing in the late fifteenth century, printed copies of sermons and Postils and pericopes were widely distributed. More than 2,200 titles were available in the German language around the year 1500; of these, more than fifty thousand copies of the Postils of Johannes Herolt of Nuremberg alone were available.\(^{34}\) Many of Luther’s contemporaries, whether Lutheran, Catholic, or Reformed, published Postils, and one of Luther’s arch-critics, Johannes Eck of Ingolstadt, published five volumes of them. Other notables who published Postils include Gabriel Biel, Johannes Bugenhagen, Desiderius Erasmus, Anton Corvin, Philip Melanchthon, Johannes Brenz, Caspar Olevian and Georg Spindler.\(^{35}\) Frymire argues for the primacy of Postils in the dissemination of ideas in Germany during the sixteenth century.

---

\(^{34}\) Ibid, 12–13.
\(^{35}\) Frymire has a comprehensive list in the appendix of his book.
The sermon was an important tool used by all the Magisterial Reformers to acquaint the illiterate people with Reformational convictions. While many historians point to the printing press as the primary tool spreading ideas of reform, it could be argued that oral sermons played an even greater role. The ordinary people in sixteenth-century Germany were illiterate, with the result that printed material reached only the learned intellectuals; its impact was to persuade scholars, pastors, and the learned elite to support the cause of the Reformation. Indeed, without these printed materials, Luther would not have gained so many allies and sympathizers across Europe. Unlike printed material, however, sermons influenced ordinary Christians in cities, towns, and villages, and the Reformers understood the importance of this. The Reformation could not permeate society on the strength of its acceptance only by the elite; it had to be embraced also by ordinary people, and weekly sermons preached in the pulpits of local churches were an important tool in achieving this goal. Therefore Patrick Ferry claims, “the sermon should lend itself naturally to the Reformation historian’s cause.”

As mentioned earlier, during the Lutheran Reformation, Postils were model sermons intended to be published and used by pastors who had embraced the Reformation. While they lacked the “precision and doctrinal finesse” of theological treatises, they were vastly influential as a tool to teach the people. As collected model sermons, Postils followed the fixed calendar of lectionary readings, which were repeated annually and in many cases were the only Scripture that people heard in their lives. These pericopes were so entrenched that many people were able

36 Patrick Ferry, “Martin Luther on preaching: promises and problems of the sermon as a source of Reformation history and as an instrument of the Reformation,” Concordia Theological Quarterly, 54:4 (1990): 265–266. The aurality of preaching is related to the theological priority given to the spoken word by the Magisterial Reformers.
37 Ibid.
to memorize the Scripture passages and remember on which Sunday they were read.\textsuperscript{38} While Frymire’s research indicates that \textit{Postils} were published by Catholics and Lutherans alike, Luther’s were the most widely distributed; his \textit{House Postils} alone went through 94 editions from 1544 to 1609, and complete sets of Luther’s \textit{Postils} (excluding the \textit{House Postils}) were published 41 times from 1525 to 1617. By Frymire’s estimate, Luther’s \textit{Postils}, including sets and individual volumes, were published 272 times from 1521 to 1617.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{Postils} bridged the gap between the “learned and traditional cultures,” that is, between the intellectuals and the illiterate population. Such a bridge is not only the conclusion reached by historians but was widely acknowledged by the leaders of all three confessions at the time. Frymire argues that it is precisely because of the wide distribution of the \textit{Postils} and their strategic influence among the people that so many were written, published, and distributed at the time. He opines that the Catholic authors wrote \textit{Postils} in the wake of the Reformation in order to compete with the ever-growing Lutheran movement. He also deduces that the Reformed authors had to resort to \textit{Postils} despite earlier opposition by Calvin because they realized that the \textit{Postils} would be the “only scriptures that most people would ever know.”\textsuperscript{40}

While sermons and \textit{Postils} didn’t always achieve their intended end, they do tell us much about the person who composed them. Biographer Martin Brecht says of Luther’s sermons that “their exegesis forms part of his foundational theological work at that time and was soon carried over into his other works.”\textsuperscript{41} Luther himself held a high view of the preached Word, believing it to be the power of God. God speaks through the preacher and is himself present to the hearer.

\textsuperscript{38} Frymire, \textit{Primacy of the Postils}, 14–17.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., Appendix 4, 535–555.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 443–444.
\textsuperscript{41} Martin Brecht, \textit{Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532}, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 16.
through the preached Word. When asked whether the words spoken by the minister in the
sermon have the same effect as the words spoken by Christ, Luther answers with a categorical
“Yes”. He quotes Luke 10:16, where Christ says, “He who hears you hears me,” and describes
the preached Word as the power of God. In fact, he places greater importance on the spoken
Word than on the written Word. He wrote in *A Brief Instruction on what to Look for and Expect
in the Gospels* that “the gospel should really not be something written, but a spoken word which
brought forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done.” Luther’s high view of
preaching is also supported by the voluminous collection of sermons he preached: the Weimar
Edition of *Luther’s Works* contains over two thousand of them. If *theologia crucis* characterizes
Luther’s entire theological thinking, we should be able to find it in his sermons, and more
specifically in his *Postils*.  

Luther started to write the *Postils* prior to 1521, but worked on them in earnest while
sequestered at the Wartburg. The two important tasks he imposed on himself at the Wartburg
were to finish the first selection of *Postils* and to translate the New Testament. Luther’s *Postils
on Advent and Christmas* were published in 1522, and his Lenten and Easter *Postils* in 1525.
Even though these sermons were not necessarily actually preached by Luther, he pronounced
them to be some of his best work, and they are important especially for uncovering his practical
theology. He called his *Postils* “the best book I ever wrote,” which “even pleases the papists.”
In his tract on “The German Mass and the Order of Service” in 1526, Luther even recommends

---

42 Martin Luther, “Table Talk,” No. 5177.
45 Martin Luther, “That These Words of Christ, ‘This is my Body,’ etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics,” n.p.,
that his *Postils* be read during the service, both to supplement the homilies of preachers who could not do any better and to curb the wayward tendencies of enthusiasts and sects. Given the importance Luther places on the *Postils*, we should expect their content to reflect his core convictions. They should certainly shed light upon how *theologia crucis*, the centre and distinctive mark of Luther’s theology, is applied to real life. This in turn, should help us to answer the question: Is there an “ ethic” of the cross? If so, how can *theologia crucis* be applied into the Christian life?

Even though the actual terms “theology of the cross” and “theology of glory” are seldom used in Luther's *Postils*, their substances permeate them. Using the *Heidelberg Disputation* as an interpretive key, we identify the following major motifs of *theologia crucis*: “the hiddenness of God”, the “weak Christ”, the futility of works righteousness, justification by faith, love toward the neighbor and cross-bearing.

The first important motif of *theologia crucis* is the hiddenness of God. Luther insists that since the Fall, human reason and wisdom are corrupt and cannot apprehend God and his revelation. God chose, therefore, to act in a different way in order that he could be apprehended and understood: he chose to reveal himself in the cross and in suffering. This different method of revelation is contrary and in opposition to the methods of fallen human reason. It is apprehended only by those who are the opposite of the wise and proud; namely, by those who are like a fool or child. Luther notes that the true gospel is learned through the cross of Jesus Christ. Fallen human reason cannot understand the way of the cross, however; fallen human reason is offended

---

by this “weak Christ”. Fallen reason cannot apprehend the gospel in the cross because God has deliberately hidden it and only faith allows us to apprehend that which reason fails to apprehend.

The second motif of theologia crucis is the futility of pursuing salvation by works. In thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther states that “A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.” The theologian of glory finds the cross and suffering repugnant and attempts to avoid it at all costs. He clings to his own righteousness and is puffed up by his so-called “good works”. Therefore the theologian of glory calls evil, good works done apart from faith, “good” and good, the cross and suffering, “evil”. The theologian of the cross, on the other hand, calls the thing what it is.

Another motif of theologia crucis is justification by faith. The doctrine of justification by faith is implicit in the theology of the cross, as evidenced in the Heidelberg Disputation. The cross, which is God’s chosen way of revealing himself to humankind, destroys any notion of salvation by works. In light of the necessity of Christ’s suffering and death for our salvation, we can claim no merit through our works; in fact, even our good works need to be redeemed. On the other hand, the cross reveals God’s mercy toward humankind, and by clinging to this mercy through faith we are saved.

Luther does not restrict the application of the theology of the cross to soteriology and justification by faith. Theses 27–28 of the Heidelberg Disputation introduce Luther's ethics of the cross. The cross reveals not only our sinnership for which Christ died, it also reveals our proper ethical orientation on earth: to love our neighbour. Therefore, Christians should do good works not to earn salvation but to benefit the neighbour, even those neighbours who are not lovable. Love is the basis of the ethics of the cross and is a major motif of theologia crucis.
Yet another motif of *theologia crucis* is cross-bearing and suffering. As Christians we are called to deny ourselves and take up our cross to follow Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ reveals to us our own cross: just as Christ must bear his cross out of love for us, we are called to bear our cross in order that we may love our neighbours. Cross-bearing is the form identifying true discipleship.

Though the actual terms “theology of the cross” and “theology of glory” are seldom used in Luther's *Postils*, if the theology of the cross is indeed characteristic of Luther’s entire theology, we should be able to find the major motifs of *theologia crucis* as outlined above in Luther’s *Postils*. The amplification of Luther’s *Postils* will uncover not only the theology of the cross as Luther taught to congregants in his time but it will also uncover the *praxis* of the cross.

**Thesis Statement**

This thesis will identify, expose, and expound both explicit and implicit material pertaining to Luther’s understanding of the theology of glory and the theology of the cross in his *Postils*. The thesis will argue that Luther considers *theologia crucis* to be practical and that the theology of the cross is the basis of Luther’s ethical teachings in the *Postils*.

In order to achieve the above purpose, the thesis will discuss the theology of the cross in terms of the *Postils’* references to such issues of discipleship and ethics as, for instance, vocation, civil obedience, and love of the neighbour.

**Methodology**

While much research of Luther’s *theologia crucis* centres on his theological tracts, his sermons and particularly his *Postils* have been neglected. This thesis will use an expository method conducting an exhaustive search through the eight-volume *Sermons of Martin Luther*, edited by John Lenker, in order to gather material relevant to the major topics belonging to the
theology of glory and the theology of the cross. In addition, the thesis will relate and compare this material to Luther’s other writings such as *The Babylonian Captivity*, *The Freedom of a Christian*, *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, *The Bondage of the Will*, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed* etc., for the sake of establishing the consistency of the *Postils* with Luther’s larger corpus.

**Content**

This study will include the following chapters:

*Chapter 1. Introduction*

a. Introduction to the theological discussions regarding the theology of the cross

b. Luther’s theology of the cross

c. Survey of existing studies of Luther’s understanding of the theology of the cross

d. Survey of existing studies on Luther’s sermons and *Postils*

e. Research methodology and sources

*Chapter 2: The theology of the cross is a theology of revelation*

The theology of the cross is first and foremost a theology of revelation. Luther contends that the difference between a theologian of glory and a theologian of the cross is first and foremost a difference in the way of knowing: a different answer to the questions of how one can know God and how a person is able to perceive the true “reality” of the world. Luther insists that the theologian of the cross calls the thing as it is, while the theologian of glory always calls good evil and evil good. Since theological epistemology is a predicate of revelation (according to Luther), Luther’s theology of revelation will be explored briefly in order to grasp his epistemology. As various Luther scholars (Althaus, von Loewenich, McAlister, Wingren,
Moltmann, Hall etc) have mentioned, the cross and what it reveals will be the interpretive key which allows the Christian to discern 1. Who God is; 2. Human sinnership; 3. The sinful human's predicament before God; 3. Christ's salvific work on the cross; 4. Justification by faith; 5. Christian's call to bear the cross; 6. Christian's duty to love the neighbor; 7. The Kingdom of Christ vs the Kingdom of the world; 8. One's own Vocation.

Chapter 3: The Soteriology of the Cross

The theology of the cross differs from the theology of glory in the way things are perceived. The first difference is in soteriology. The theology of glory insists upon salvation by human good works, while the theology of the cross relies only on the grace of God, a God who comes down to save human beings.

Chapter 4: The Ethics of the Cross

The difference in soteriology in turn leads to a different view of ethics: how one is to conduct oneself toward others both in the church and in the world. While good works for the purpose of gaining salvation is categorically rejected by the theologian of the cross, he nevertheless does not reject the doing of good works *per se*. Rather, good works are done as the implicate of salvation by faith. This chapter will explore the implication of the cross for Christian discipleship and ethics.

Chapter 5: Cross-bearing and the Cost of Discipleship

The theology of the cross not only focuses on the cross of Jesus Christ, it also compels every believer to bear her own cross in following Christ. This chapter will discuss the forms taken by that cross as well as the functions they serve.
Chapter 6: The Christian living between the Two Kingdoms

As chapters 4 and 5 deal with the implications of the theology of the cross for the inner life of the believer: the motivation, standards and perseverance under the cross, chapter 6 will discuss the outer expression of theologia crucis in both the civic and spiritual realm.

Conclusion

The conclusion will summarize the preceding chapters and attempt to engage contemporary discussion of the theology of the cross using the material uncovered in the thesis.

Implications

1. This study will contribute significantly to a relatively untouched area of Luther studies—Luther’s Postils—filling a significant gap left by researchers.

2. This study contributes to the discussion surrounding the theology of the cross by evaluating Luther’s application of theologia crucis into everyday life and thus helps to develop an ethic of the cross.
Chapter 2
The Theology of the Cross is a theology of revelation

In order to understand Luther's ethics of the cross, we must begin with the epistemology of the cross. As various theologians have summarized, the theology of the cross which Luther introduced in the Heidelberg Disputation claims that *theologia crucis* is a theology of revelation. It is a different way of looking at the world. Luther maintains that the theologian of glory calls good evil and evil good. The theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross have entirely opposite ways of looking at the world. Their sense of good and evil are contrary to each other, since the theologian of glory wrongly depends on abilities the human being does not have.

Luther insists that at the Fall, human reason and wisdom were corrupted. Therefore, we could not apprehend God through our reason and understanding. Therefore, God chose to act in a different way in order that he could be apprehended and understood by us. This different method of revelation is contrary to the methods of corrupt human reason. It is the revelation of the cross.

This revelation must be regarded as indirect and concealed. This revelation is to be recognized in the sufferings and cross of Christ, rather than in human moral activity or the created order. This knowledge of God who is hidden in his revelation is a matter of faith, not sight, and God is known particularly through suffering.

Luther unpacks his epistemology of the cross in his *Postils*. He maintains that this revelation of the cross is transmitted through God’s Word. To Luther, the Word of God refers to Christ as The Word, Scriptures as the written Word and preaching as the spoken Word. God reveals himself in Christ the living Word. The Scriptures preached are the vehicle which brings to the living Christ to the hearer. The Holy Spirit then quickens the sinner who appropriates Christ by faith.
The “Contrarian” way of revelation through the cross

First, Luther establishes in the Postils that the revelation of the cross is a contrarian way of revelation. This different method of revelation is contrary to the methods of corrupt human reason. It is understood only by those who are the opposite of the wise and proud; namely, by those who are like fools or children. In his Postil on Easter Day, Luther notes that the women, considered ignorant by society, were the first ones to whom Christ chose to reveal himself. The disciples, who were by no means learned nor respected by their fellow Israelites, were the next to see their risen Lord. Christ also chose to explain the mysteries of the Older Testament to these disciples so that they might “view Moses with different eyes” and believe, while the same mysteries remain hidden—in plain sight, as it were—to those who are wise and proud.

Luther introduces this “contrarian” way as the way of the cross. He cites 1 Corinthians 2:2, where Paul insists that he will know nothing except Jesus Christ crucified. Luther notes that the true Gospel is learned through the cross of Jesus Christ. Corrupt human reason cannot understand the way of the cross; human reason is offended by this “weak Christ” and indeed “would undoubtedly teach and advise God not to permit his own Son to be shamefully and ignominiously dealt with as a murderer and malefactor.” Human reason seeks only after things that are noble, precious, and honourable—the things desired by the “theologians of glory”, as Luther calls them in the Heidelberg Disputation. The theologians of glory do not understand why God put his Son on the cross, and see there only a wretched, forsaken, despised, shameful, and

47 Martin Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 2, 294.
48 Martin Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 2, 250.
49 Ibid., 309.
50 Ibid., 33.
sinful man. They themselves flee from “dishonor, contempt, suffering, misery and the like.”

Reason cannot apprehend the Gospel in the cross because God has deliberately hidden it. He “put a covering over Christ when he drew over him death and weakness, and Christ was under it, though no man could see it.” Only faith allows us to apprehend that which reason fails to apprehend; namely, that the cross of Christ is the most glorious thing in the world, because on it Christ overcame sin and death.

Luther calls the Christ on the cross the “weak Christ”. This Christ is wholly contrary to the expectations of the theologians of glory. The theologians of glory expected the promised Messiah to come in mighty splendour, yet Christ came hidden in his lowliness. Luther contends that the birth of Christ is the first sign of his lowly nature. He was not born in a nobleman’s house or a palace adorned by jewels and precious metals. He was not even born in the house of a middle-class well-to-do professional. He was born in a stable, lacking comfort or status. In this way God seems to hide from the world; he hides in a stable, away from the rich and powerful. God completely disregarded the desires and expectations of the world and chose to come in a way contrary to those expectations. At the same time, this shows how little the wise man of the world “knows or notices what God is, has and does.” The birth of Christ in a stable exposes the foolishness of the world. It reveals that the ways of the world are contrary to the ways of God, and that “her best actions are wrong and her greatest treasures are misfortunes.”

In his Postil for the third Sunday of Advent, Luther points out that not only were the manner and place of Christ’s birth contrary to expectations, his being born to a lowly family is

---

51 Ibid., 33.
52 Ibid., 307-308.
53 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 1, 138.
54 Ibid., 138-139
also baffling for those who rely on natural reason (i.e., reasoning unrestored by grace). The idea of a humble and common Christ, born the son of a carpenter, not learned, and not of the priesthood, is so far removed from the imagination of the Jews that they could not believe the announcement of John the Baptist, that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-awaited Messiah.55

Those who heard John’s announcement of the coming of the Christ, whom he described as so exalted that John himself was unworthy to tie his shoes, expected this Christ to arrive with splendour and pomp. They expected him to come as a noble with all the material accoutrements deserving of the Messiah, as a mighty king sitting on the throne ruling over his subjects. On the contrary, however, Christ comes as companion of the blind, lame, deaf, and dumb. He associated with the poor and presented himself as a humble servant rather than a great king. This was in stark contradiction to the expectations of the Jews for their Messiah.56

Luther further advances this theme of the lowly Christ in the Postil for the first Sunday of Advent, where he points out that Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on the back of a colt and his subsequent death on the cross are contrary to the prevailing Jewish messianic expectations of the time. The Jews of the time expected a Messiah of glory, someone who would come with power and might to subdue their enemies, the Roman Empire. They envisioned one who would lead the Jews in the struggle against their conquerors, overthrow Roman rule, and re-establish the earthly kingdom of Israel. They did not expect a Messiah who would die on the cross.57

Jesus wished to dispel the erroneous expectation of a Messiah of glory. He chose to ride into Jerusalem on the back of a colt, showing himself to be meek and gentle.58 He wanted his

55 Ibid., 89-90.
56 Ibid., 101-102.
57 Ibid., 41-42.
58 In alluding to the OT prophets, Luther maintains that Jesus Christ fulfills God’s promise to Israel even as God
followers to turn their eyes away from the imaginary king of glory and fix their eyes instead on
the “poor, miserable, almost beggarly horseman upon a borrowed ass who is kept by the side of
its mother not for ostentation but for service.”

Theologians of glory look for Christ in the high places among the rich, strong, and
powerful. They reason that the world can be changed only by these men, men who have the
wealth and power to control society. Christ, on the other hand, wills for us to seek his identity in
the works he does, serving the poor and the outcasts of society: the lepers, the blind, lame, deaf
and dumb. Christ associates with the poor, the sick, and the needy because his kingdom is self-
sufficient and needs no help from others. It is not the case that Christ needs to recruit the rich,
strong, healthy, powerful, and pious to accomplish his work. And since he came expressly to
heal the sick and to save sinners, Christ must associate with the blind, the lame, the dumb, the
poor, the sinful, and the weak.

Reason (i.e., philosophical speculation) cannot reconcile this lowly Christ with the
promised Messiah. Reason demands that the Messiah be a glorious king, coming in grandeur and
might. How could this Jesus, who was born of a lowly carpenter, be the Messiah promised in the
Scriptures? The lowliness of Christ becomes a stumbling-block and an offence to those who rely
on human reason to interpret the promises of Scripture. Luther insists that only those who look to
Christ’s works, which identify him as the Christ prophesied by the prophets in the Older
Testament, recognize him as the promised One.

thereby contradicts Israel’s expectations.
59 Ibid., 42-43.
60 Ibid., 102-103.
61 Ibid., 103.
Luther calls the teaching of a different Christ from this an offence of doctrine. Those Jews who imagined and taught that Christ was coming as a temporal king committed this offence. All of God’s commandments and works appear to be foolish in the eyes of the world; they are contemptible and beneath the wise. God has decreed this contrarian way in order to put to shame those who are wise. God’s ways are wise even though the eyes of reason cannot see this kind of wisdom. If God were to use signs agreeable to our human reason, he would risk our relying on worldly, temporal things rather than on God himself. Furthermore, if God were to speak according to human desires and understanding, it would go against his own designs. Therefore, Luther insists that we must allow God to be God, and let him choose the manner, timing, and medium of his speech. God deliberately gives signs contrary to our corrupt human reason so as to pull us away from seeking what reason erroneously deems to be good, honourable, wise, and profitable. He desires us to forsake temporal honour and wisdom, to become for his sake what we consider foolish, poor, and despised. God’s contrarian way of revelation is not agreeable to us, but God wills to work in this way and he does not change. Therefore, we must adapt ourselves to him and not expect him to adapt to us.

**Gospel carried by the Word**

The cross is the central place where the Gospel is revealed, and this Gospel is carried to us by the Word of God. In his sermons Luther identifies Christ himself, as well as Holy Scripture both written and preached, as the Word of God. Word in the form of Scripture is the vehicle of

---

62 Ibid., 309.
63 Ibid., 142.
64 Ibid., 142-143.
the cross, while the cross attested to by Scripture is the place where Christ and his Gospel are revealed.⁶⁵

**Christ the Incarnate Word**

First, Christ is the Word of God embodied, the Incarnate Word.⁶⁶ Christ is the Word of life, and whoever “grasps and retains Christ, has thus also eternal deliverance from death.”⁶⁷ Luther carefully distinguishes the Incarnate Word from the written and preached Word: the Incarnate Word is by nature God himself, while the written and preached Word is the power of God.⁶⁸ Since Christ the Incarnate Word is contained in both the written and the preached Word, God himself is present to us through them; this is what makes them powerful. The Word of God will not come back to him empty, but will accomplish that which God desires and the purpose for which he sent it.

Luther has a high view of the Word. The Word is the power of God. God rules by his Word in his Kingdom. God’s power is comprehended in the Word. It has the power to save those who believe and it will save all those who believe. One should cling to the Word and thereby find it to be certain and sure.⁶⁹

**Scripture is the manger for the Christ-child**

Scripture is also the Word of God. It is the Word of God because Christ is found only in Holy Scripture.⁷⁰ In his *Postil* on Luke 2:41-52, Luther interprets Scripture allegorically: he notes that Mary and Joseph looked everywhere for their teenage son Jesus, but found him only

---

⁶⁵ See the discussion on “Word of God” in V. Shepherd’s *Interpreting Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Thought*. Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Pub., 2008.
⁶⁶ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 177.
⁶⁷ Ibid., 177.
⁷⁰ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 29.
when they returned to the Temple. Luther argues that the Temple is an allegory for the Word of
God, noting that “he [i.e., Christ] is especially present in Holy Scripture, in his Word.”

71 He also uses the imagery of the manger to explain the presence of Christ in Scripture: just as the manger
is where the Christ-child was found at birth by the shepherds, so Scripture is the place where we
\textit{can find Christ. Christ is “completely wrapped in the Scriptures, just as the body is wrapped in
the clothes.”}72 Not only is Christ to be found in Scripture, Luther insists that revealing Christ to
the world is the sole function of Scripture. He states that “the Scriptures speak of no other theme
than of Christ, and they treat only of Christ, who must fulfill the Scriptures by his death.”73

Luther also compares the Scriptures to the Temple where God is found. In the \textit{Postil} on
Luke 2, Luther declares that “The temple is an abode of God, therefore signifying every place
where God is present. Among others it also signifies the Holy Scriptures, where God may be
found as in his proper place.”74 Luther insists that all Scripture proclaims the Gospel and bears
witness to Christ.75 Indeed, Christ chose the Scriptures as the means to reveal himself; Scripture
was given for this purpose. Furthermore, Christ desires to be found only in the Scriptures. Luther
boldly claims that no one can find Christ apart from the Scriptures,76 and no one can become a
Christian apart from the Scriptures. The Scriptures alone teach the Christian faith and engender it
in the reader.77

\begin{footnotes}
71 Ibid., 23.
72 Ibid., 29.
73 Ibid., 125.
74 Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 260.
75 Ibid., 261-263.
76 Ibid., 337-338.
77 Ibid., 342-343.
\end{footnotes}
The Old Testament also contains Christ

While much of Luther’s attention is focused on the New Testament, Luther is not a Marcionite; he holds the Older Testament in high regard and maintains that it is also Scripture. In fact, Luther insists, the apostles direct us to the Old Testament, which constitutes the Holy Scriptures proper to them, and refer to it repeatedly because Christ is contained in it. Luther goes so far as to claim that “the Old Testament contains nothing else than Christ.” Alluding to the Transfiguration, Luther interprets Moses and Elijah allegorically to represent the Law and the Prophets, insisting that Christ is to be found in both and that the Old Testament is the swaddling clothes which contain Christian truths.

Luther sees the Law of Moses as a testimony or sign of the Messiah. The cleansing laws in particular point to the future spiritual cleansing which Christ brings to those who believe. Luther declares that in our unbelief we are like spiritual lepers; when we come to faith, Christ the priest touches us, heals us, and cleanses us of our iniquities. Moses gave testimony to the coming Christ through the Law, Luther insists, and the Gospel was promised by God in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. He further maintains that the entire Old Testament is a sign pointing out and making known Christ.

Luther maintains that all of the New Testament looks back into the Old. Whereas the Old Testament is the proclamation of the promise of God, the New Testament proclaims the coming of Christ and the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. Luther also compares the Old Testament to a sealed will, which is to be opened later and its contents revealed only after the

---

78 Ibid., 31.
79 Ibid., 150.
80 Ibid., 150
81 Ibid., 152.
82 Ibid., 261-262.
83 Ibid., 174.
death of the testator. The Old Testament is like the will of Christ, its contents revealed after the
death and resurrection of Christ and properly interpreted by the New Testament. The function of
the New Testament is not to add new revelation of the Christ but to point out that Jesus is the
Christ already contained in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the clothes in which
Christ is wrapped. However, the Christ is not immediately apparent in the Old Testament; the
New Testament must be used as the key which “throws its light upon it and reveals it”.

**Scripture authenticates and interprets itself**

The Word of God is authenticated not by human beings but by God himself. Luther
opposes the view of the Medieval Church that the Pope and the councils are the authenticators
and interpreters of Scripture. Human beings do not hold the proper interpretation of the Word,
insists Luther; rather, Scripture interprets itself. Interpretations by the saints and church fathers
are not authoritative. Scripture stands in judgment over all human teachings. Even the
interpretation of the saints must be judged by the Scriptures and not the other way around.
Furthermore, even the holiest of humans cannot authenticate the Word. Luther declares instead
that “God must speak to your heart”; God alone can authenticate his own Word. The Word of
God carries God himself to the hearer; when God speaks, “the whole Godhead accompanies the
Word and in its nature remains in, and essentially is, the Word.” God is present to the hearer of
the Word and thereby authenticates the Word as his.

---

84 Ibid., 174.
85 Ibid., 150-151.
86 Ibid., 342.
87 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, 204.
88 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 178.
The Preached Word

While Luther describes Scripture as the manger where the Christ-child is laid, he also likens the manger to the preaching of the Gospel.\(^89\) He contends that merely reading the Word is not enough, that it must also be heard through preaching. In other words, Christ has two witnesses: the written Word and the preached Word.\(^90\)

In his *Postil* on Luke 24:13–35, the passage in which the resurrected Christ explains all the prophecies of the Older Testament to his two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luther insists that “so strange and unknowable had he [i.e., Christ] become to them that they would not have known him, had he stayed with them ever so long, until he announced to them his resurrection and preached about it.”\(^91\) As proof that the spoken Word is necessary for salvation, Luther cites the fact that neither the disciples nor the women recognized Christ until they had heard the Word of his resurrection.

Luther believes that God speaks through the preacher and is himself present to the hearer through the preached Word. When asked whether the words spoken by the minister in the sermon have the same effect as the words spoken by Christ, Luther answers with a categorical “Yes”. He quotes Luke 10:16, where Christ says, “He who hears you hears me,” and describes the preached word as the power of God.\(^92\) In fact, he places more importance on the spoken Word than on the written Word. He writes in *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels* that “the gospel should really not be something written, but a spoken word which

\(^{89}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 29.

\(^{90}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 371.

\(^{91}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 284.

\(^{92}\) Luther, “Table Talk,” No. 5177.
brought forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done.”93 He presents the example of Christ as proof: “Christ himself did not write anything but only spoke. He called his teaching not Scripture but gospel, meaning good news or a proclamation that is spread not by pen but by word of mouth.”94 Furthermore, Luther describes the preaching of the gospel as “nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him.”95

Luther’s strong belief in the power of the Word preached is also evident in his Postils. He states that “we must first hear the Gospel, and after that believe and love and do good works.”96 As proof of the power of the preached Word, Luther again uses the example of the change it effected in the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As soon as Jesus begins to preach a “masterly sermon” explaining the prophecies regarding him, the disciples “immediately feel its power…and become enlightened and receive a new understanding, so that now they begin to know the Scriptures aright…. Finally the mask and cover are taken away from their hearts and eyes, so that they no longer look upon him as a guest and a stranger, but truly know him.”97

Luther maintains that the proclamation of the Word originates with Christ. Christ is the one who first proclaimed the Gospel and he subsequently instilled it “in the hearts of the apostles and their successors so that they understood it, and into their mouths so that they spoke and declared it.”98 Luther regards the true New Testament to be the incarnate Christ himself and not written words. He reminds us that Christ did not write anything himself, but only commanded

94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 72-73.
98 Ibid., 290-291.
the Gospel to be preached. Of course, Luther is not devaluing the written Scriptures, since he maintains that Christ himself is hidden in them.\textsuperscript{99}

The proclamation of the Gospel originated with Christ. Christ exercised the office of preaching and continued his itinerant ministry, “carried on by the office of preaching.”\textsuperscript{100} At his ascension, Christ instructed his followers to preach the Gospel throughout the world. They were to bring his goodness and grace to all humankind through the proclamation of the Word, and he willed that such proclamation always be fruitful in those who hear.\textsuperscript{101} Luther insists that it is the character and nature of the Gospel to be preached to the entire world, that the completion of this task is inevitable, and that the Scripture regards it as a \textit{fait accompli}.

Luther often calls the church the “mouth-house” on account of the fact that Christ is to be preached there. The Gospel was hidden at first in the written Scriptures, but since the coming of Christ, he and his apostles unveil it through preaching. The church, insists Luther, is therefore a “mouth-house”, not a “pen-house”.\textsuperscript{102} Preaching is not merely a human activity; it is the bearer of the Kingdom, says Luther: “the kingdom of Christ is contained in the public oral office of preaching.”\textsuperscript{103} Luther argues that it is the nature of the Gospel to be preached (i.e., preaching inheres the Gospel). The Gospel is a living voice preached through the mouth-house to the world. He affirms not only the \textit{oral} nature of the Word, but also its \textit{aural} nature: the written Scriptures cannot be understood until living voices reach the ears. The Gospel is concealed in the letter and must be proclaimed to the ear.\textsuperscript{104} When the Gospel is preached and heard, Christ reigns in the

\textsuperscript{99} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 31.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 43-44.
\textsuperscript{101} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 6, 114.
\textsuperscript{102} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 44.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 371-372.
heart without the need of another medium. The Holy Spirit carries all the fullness of God into our hearts through the preached Gospel.\footnote{105}

Luther did not merely theorize about the importance of preaching, he exemplified it. He preached at least weekly in Wittenberg, covering the Pentateuch from 1523 to 1529 and the Gospels of Matthew and John from 1528 to 1529.\footnote{106} When pastor John Bugenhagen was absent from Wittenberg, Luther often substituted for him in the City Church; in 1529, Luther preached more than 121 times in the absence of Bugenhagen.\footnote{107} Luther was also invited to preach in various other cities to propagate the Reformation message and to dispel suspicions about evangelical preaching. He preached in Borna, Altenburg, Zwickau, Torgau, and Eilenburg in the first half of 1522 alone.\footnote{108}

Luther not only preached himself, but also compiled his church \textit{Postils} as model sermons, to be used by other pastors who had difficulty preparing a literate sermon week by week. As mentioned earlier, Luther even advised pastors who could not construct their own sermons to read the \textit{Postils} verbatim. In addition, he actively recommended suitable preachers to cities embracing the Reformation: John Bugenhagen became the pastor at the city church in Wittenberg when its council took the advice of Luther.\footnote{109} Luther participated in the search for qualified pastors in other cities as well, such as Altenburg, although the candidate selected there was not the one he recommended.\footnote{110}

\footnotetext[105]{Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 5, 371.}
\footnotetext[107]{Ibid., 284.}
\footnotetext[108]{Ibid., 66–68.}
\footnotetext[109]{Ibid., 72.}
\footnotetext[110]{Ibid., 70.}
Luther’s faith in the spoken Word extended beyond preaching in the church setting. He believed that words spoken in ordinary situations proclaiming Christ are just as effective as those spoken in the church setting. This is evident throughout his Postils. In the Postil regarding the healing of the blind man in Jericho, for instance, Luther observes that the man “hears that Christ was passing by, he had also heard of him before, that Jesus of Nazareth was a kind man, and that he helps everyone who only calls upon him. His faith and confidence in Christ grew out of his hearing; so he did not doubt but that Christ would also help him. But such faith in his heart he would not have been able to possess had he not heard and known of Christ; for faith does not come except by hearing.”

In his Postil on Luke 11:14–23, where Jesus casts out a demon from a man who was both dumb and blind, Luther insists that this poor man “did not come to Christ without the Word; for those who brought him to Christ must have heard his love preached and were moved thereby to trust in him.”

In the Postil regarding the woman in Mark 7 whose daughter was demon-possessed, Luther once again notes that the woman had heard some news about Jesus and that this news was “without doubt good news, and the good report that Christ was a pious man and cheerfully helped everybody. Such news about God is a true Gospel and a word of grace, out of which sprang the faith of this woman.”

While Luther rejects most of the Medieval rituals, he does accept private confession and absolution as a means of grace. He does not accept that the clergy have any special authority to absolve sins, but allows that any forgiveness pronounced by any believer in the name of Christ can indeed bring comfort to the hearer. Luther contends that “in the preaching of the Gospel the Word is publicly preached in a general way, to all who are present; and in absolution this same

---

111 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 129.
112 Ibid., 156.
113 Ibid., 148-149.
Word is spoken especially and privately to one or more who so desire it.”114 In this case, “Christ himself comes to me in my confessor.”115 The confessor does not speak his own word but is rather the occasion of the Word of God, God-in-person speaking and acting salvifically.

**Faith alone appropriates the Word**

The Word of God is the vehicle by which God Himself is revealed to us. Scripture testifies to Christ and reveals him to us. As indicated earlier in the chapter, the Word cannot be appropriated by reason; ever since the Fall, reason is perverted by sin and cannot apprehend the Gospel naturalistically. Luther insists that while Scripture testifies to Christ, he is hidden within it, so that “many read and study in the Scriptures and yet they cannot find Christ.”116 Christ and the Gospel are veiled like “the veil of Moses before the face of the Jews.”117 Hence the Scriptures can only be understood properly with the assistance of the Holy Spirit and received through faith. Faith admits us to a reality which is inaccessible to naturalistic reason.

In the *Postil* on Romans 13, Luther notes that Paul compares the Gospel to the daylight which shines in our hearts and chases away all the evils of the night. It reveals Christ and his grace to us, making known the eternal salvation which was first promised to Abraham. This Gospel which is described as the daylight is produced by Jesus Christ, who is the sun. It teaches us about the nature of God, about ourselves, about heaven, earth, hell, angels, and devils, and also about how we are to relate to all these.118

---

114 Ibid., 348-349.
115 Ibid., 401.
116 Ibid., 181.
117 Ibid., 292-293.
118 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 15-18.
Luther insists that “without faith we are simply blind.” According to Luther, faith is the true light which allows us to see the sun (Christ) and the day (Gospel). If we cannot see, then even if the sun shines brightly, it is of no benefit to us. So it is that even if the pure Gospel of Christ is preached, if the hearer does not receive it through faith, it profits no one. Luther denounces the Pope and Papist theologians, the theologians of glory, who champion Aristotle over the Scriptures. In deferring to Aristotle rather than the Scriptures, they choose the “inferior light” of reason over faith and shun Christ the sun of the world. It is by faith alone that Christ and the Gospel are appropriated. Moreover, this faith required to appropriate the Word is given by the Holy Spirit and does not belong to us by nature.

Luther insists that we “must first hear the Gospel, and after that believe.” Hearing alone is not enough, even though one cannot believe without first hearing the Gospel. In his sermon on the healing of the blind man, Luther observes that the blind man firmly believed what he had heard of Christ, and this faith led him to Christ. And in the Postil on the healing of the deaf, Luther postulates that the people had heard the Gospel before they came to Christ for healing. Again and again Luther preaches that the Word must first be heard before faith can appropriate it in our hearts.

---

119 Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 405.
120 Ibid., 331-332.
121 Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 16.
122 Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 123.
123 Ibid., 72-73.
124 Ibid., 129.
125 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 371.
126 Ibid., 371.
To be sure, what faith appropriates is not only the intellectual content of the Word but the living Christ himself. Faith apprehends the Christ who is revealed in the Word, and recognizes
and appropriates him as the sole author of our salvation. First, faith recognizes Christ where reason is blind; reason does not recognize Christ and his Gospel, for unbelief is blind to the Gospel. For the learned, pious, and wise, the ones Luther calls the theologians of glory, the Word of God regarding Christ is contemptible, foolish, and sacrilegious. This Christ who is contrary to reason and wisdom is appropriated only by those who hunger and thirst for God’s grace. It is only the ones who look with the eyes of faith who recognize Christ. Luther exhorts believers to hold fast to God’s Word even if most other people oppose it; numbers alone should not deter us from clinging to the Word.

Secondly, faith appropriates Christ himself. Faith affirms that salvation comes from Christ alone; no amount of good works will save us. Scripture urges readers to put faith in Christ only, for Christ alone saves us and wins mercy for us. Good works come only after we are saved. Here, Luther boldly claims that faith “makes Christ and the believer one.” Faith possesses the heart of Christ, so that everything belonging to Christ now belongs to the believer, including right understanding. Again, Luther teaches that faith appropriates the blessing offered by the Gospel. The Word offers this blessing to us and we appropriate it by faith. This blessing is first and foremost Christ himself. As we appropriate Christ, all that he possesses, especially his righteousness becomes ours. In exchange, Christ also possesses all that belonged

127 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 8, 16-17.
128 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 7, 197-198.
129 Luther, Sermons, vol. 1, 300.
130 Ibid., 416.
131 Ibid., 314.
132 Ibid., 421.
133 Ibid., 250.
134 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 197.
to us, exchanging his righteousness for our sin. He took on our sin, became a sinner, and died in our stead. This is the sweet exchange preached by Luther.

Faith in Christ is not restricted to those who come after Christ; Old Testament saints also heard God’s Word and, after hearing, believed it. Luther gives the example of Abraham, about whom Jesus said, “Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.” When did Abraham, who chronologically came before Jesus of Nazareth, “see” Christ? Luther maintains that he saw “with the sight of faith in the heart; that is, he recognized Christ when he was told in Genesis 22:18: ‘In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’” 135

Luther also maintains that faith does not come from us; it must be quickened. The living Word, the Word which is power by the Holy Spirit, quickens us. 136 Reason cannot understand or grasp Scripture; God must “reveal it in [our] hearts by his Spirit.” 137 Again, it is not possible for us to understand the true meaning of the cross and suffering of Christ “unless God sink them into our hearts.” 138

While faith is the only way to appropriate the Word, Luther also insists that proper faith relies only on that Word. He maintains that “where there is no Word of God there cannot and shall not be any faith.” 139 The Word is both the proper object and the author of faith. The Scriptures lay the foundation on which faith appropriates the Gospel, and at the same time, faith reaches out from that foundation not towards any and every object but only to the Word. In his Postil on Luke 2, Luther calls faith the first and principal fruit of the Word. The Word coming in its power creates faith, as in the case of the shepherds who believed the word of the angels and

137 Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 126.
138 Ibid., 187-188.
139 Luther, Sermons, vol. 1, 365.
went to seek out the baby Jesus: the Word proclaimed by the angels quickens faith in the shepherds.\textsuperscript{140} Christ comes to the hearer by the power of the Holy Spirit and creates faith, penetrating the heart of the one who believes.\textsuperscript{141}

Christ sends forth the Word to all. The Word must be experienced in our heart by means of the faith that Christ creates in our heart.\textsuperscript{142} Though the Word is preached to all, only those who believe from the heart appropriate it. Luther here speaks of the power of the Word. It is the power to save, but it is hidden and can be appropriated only by faith.\textsuperscript{143}

Luther also exhorts believers to distinguish between true and false faith. True faith believes the Word for its own sake, not because of the person who preaches it. The person who receives the Word because of the preacher does not truly believe the Word, nor does he believe in Christ; his faith is only in the preacher. Luther calls this a false faith, a merely human faith, which does not last long.\textsuperscript{144} True faith cleaves to the Word, which is God himself.\textsuperscript{145} In the Postil on the Annunciation, Luther uses the example of Mary to illustrate this true faith: Mary clings to the words of the angels and the shepherds and ponders them in her heart, believing them not as mere human words but as the Word of God.\textsuperscript{146}

True faith is also voluntary; that is the nature and character of faith, says Luther. It does not force a person to accept, but leaves the decision to the person: “He that believes, believes; he that comes, comes, he that stays out, stays out.”\textsuperscript{147} Faith cannot be coerced; coercion will lead only to an outward appearance of acceptance while the heart remains unmoved, but God’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 162.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 20-21.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{144} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 266.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 266
\item \textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 163.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 201.
\end{itemize}
salvation “aims to possess the heart.” Parents can teach their children how to behave, and civil governments can regulate behaviour through the sword, but these coercive methods can never bring forth true faith. Similarly, the Pope resorts in vain to commands, bans, and bulls in order to win the people, but Luther is adamant that these means can never accomplish their aim, for true faith and acceptance is from the heart. We must freely accept God’s commands - in a freedom facilitated by the grace inherent in the Word - because of our faith in the Word, since faith recognizes not only the Word as gift but also the Word as gift-grounded claim. Though this faith does not originate from us but from God, we must nevertheless truly believe in our heart, since faith ever remains a divine gift that must be humanly exercised.

**Faith versus reason**

Luther is adamant that in the wake of the Fall, all reason is perverted and it is therefore impossible for human reason to apprehend things of God. Reason has no access to God; only faith can recognize Christ and appropriate him. Luther pits faith against reason again and again in his *Postils*. He insists that nature and grace are opposites and can never be friends. Whereas nature demands first to see and feel before believing, grace believes first before perceiving. Therefore, nature and reason are always self-centred and are unwilling to surrender to the Word.

Reason looks for splendour in religion, in good and noble works; but faith knows that even the best works are sin before God since done in unbelief of the heart. Luther asserts that real faith is contrary to all human expectations; it does not appear to be faith to human eyes.

---

148 Ibid., 288-289.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 329-330.
152 Ibid., 362.
153 Ibid., 105.
What reason and wisdom deem to be faith is really no faith at all. God chose the lowly things of the world to reveal himself; therefore, faith “finds riches in poverty, honor in dishonor, joy in sorrow, life in death, and holds fast to them in that faith which clings to the Word and expects such things.”

Reason rejects the lowly Christ, offended by this Christ of poverty and humility; hence Christ cannot be known by reason and must be revealed by a heavenly knowledge.

In his Postil on the presentation of Jesus at the Temple, Luther praises Mary and Joseph for exemplifying strong faith when they believe the word of Simeon that their child Jesus is the Christ. Mary and Joseph do not look at outward appearances, which would only draw the conclusion that Jesus is a poor child; instead they cling to the Word by faith and therefore see the Christ-child through the eyes of faith. In the Postil on John 3, Luther points to the fact that Nicodemus could not understand Christ even though he was a leader among the Pharisees and regarded as one of the best minds of the day. In fact, Luther asserts, “the longer Nicodemus associates with Christ, the less he understands Christ.” This is a clear indictment of natural reason, that even the wisest men by the standard of reason can know nothing of God naturalistically. Reason does not understand, but faith does. Reason cannot discover the Gospel, nor ever accept it; reason cannot accept that our salvation is through faith in Christ only, that works are of no salvific value before God. Faith, however, clinging to the Word, judges not by sight but by the Spirit and receives Christ in his humility.

---

154 Ibid., 23.
155 Ibid., 147-148.
156 Ibid., 258.
157 Ibid., 259.
159 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 24.
160 Ibid., 147.
161 Ibid., 22-23.
Luther asserts that fallen reason only leads us away from God. The Gospel, however, leads reason away from itself and towards faith.\textsuperscript{162} Therefore Luther exhorts believers to forsake reason and philosophical speculation in favour of the Scriptures. He postulates that even Arius and Sabellius would not have erred if they had clung to the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{163} Philosophy leads us away from Christ into ourselves, but Scripture leads us away from ourselves into Christ.\textsuperscript{164} Luther vehemently condemns fallen reason, because it always opposes God’s will; it regards God’s will as evil and coming from the devil because it does not conform to the standards set by reason. Since everything that reason esteems is rejected by God, reason believes God to be evil.\textsuperscript{165} Meanwhile reason fails to realize that it is itself an instrument of the devil, leading people away from God: according to Luther, reason is the “devil’s bride”.\textsuperscript{166} All that it estimates to be good is really evil. Faith, on the other hand, knows that human reason, wisdom, virtues, and power are worth nothing before God. Faith clings to God’s Word alone.\textsuperscript{167} As Luther declares again and again, we all have the natural light, but Christ alone is the true light.\textsuperscript{168}

Luther states that reason and nature cling only to what they can see and feel.\textsuperscript{169} He warns the believer that human feelings tend to be swayed by external factors, enemies, sickness, poverty, sin, death, and the devil. These are apprehended “by reason and the senses”, and may be “heard, seen, felt, and known by the outward senses”.\textsuperscript{170} Faith, by contrast, clings to the Word, which assures us that Christ through his death and resurrection has prevailed over sin, death, and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{165} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 17.
\textsuperscript{166} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 81.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 190.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 362.
\textsuperscript{170} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 2, 244.
\end{flushleft}
the devil and that we are safe in the hands of Christ. Luther emphatically exhorts believers to “renounce your reason and close your eyes,” clinging only to the Word by faith.\textsuperscript{171} Reason only sees a disgraced Christ on the cross, hanging there like a murderer and scoundrel, a common criminal. Reason cannot believe that the Messiah, the Saviour sent by God, could end up on the cross in shame.\textsuperscript{172} Again and again Luther exhorts the believer to close the eyes and senses and cling only to the Word which she hears. He contends that not everything a person feels and sees is to be believed;\textsuperscript{173} the Word of Christ takes supremacy over all of it. The eyes and senses lie, while only God’s Word is true.\textsuperscript{174} God’s Word alone is the true standard of right and wrong, true and false, wise and foolish, righteousness and sin.\textsuperscript{175}

At times Luther seems to pit reason against faith and strip reason of any value.\textsuperscript{176} In one Postil, Luther insists that the natural light of reason is perverted by sin and therefore “must become extinguished and die out.”\textsuperscript{177} Luther maintains that the mysteries of God, his essence, will, and works are indiscernible to human reason and can only be revealed by the Word of God.\textsuperscript{178} This knowledge can only be “imparted to them by the Holy Spirit, who reveals and proclaims it through the Word.”\textsuperscript{179} Human reason cannot recognize revelation nor accept it as truth; it can only despise revelation in favour of what it perceives to be good works.\textsuperscript{180} Luther is adamant that natural light leads only to sin, as it pursues selfish aims.\textsuperscript{181} It refuses to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{171} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 413.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 420.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 5, 88-89.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 241-242.
\item \textsuperscript{175} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{176} For a thorough discussion of this matter see Jennifer Hockenbery Dragseth, ed., \textit{The Devil's Whore: Reason and Philosophy in the Lutheran Tradition}, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).
\item \textsuperscript{177} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 190-191.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 12-13.
\item \textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 9.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 12-13.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 192.
\end{itemize}
acknowledge that salvation comes only from pure grace; instead it argues and protests against grace and insists on the merits of good works. Natural reason cannot stand to be told that all good works are sin; it always wants claim to a little bit of goodness.\textsuperscript{182} Natural reason is arrogant and deludes itself into confidence in works.\textsuperscript{183} It raises itself above God, judging for itself what is from God,\textsuperscript{184} but Luther insists that one must seek God in the manner in which God chooses to reveal himself (i.e., one can truly seek God only after the God of the Gospel has found one).\textsuperscript{185} Because natural reason stubbornly clings to works and refuses to follow the Gospel,\textsuperscript{186} Luther boldly pronounces that all of God’s works and words are contrary to reason and reason contrary to God.\textsuperscript{187}

In the \textit{Postil} on baptism, Luther rebuffs those who argue that children should not be baptized because they do not have the capacity to reason: “[T]ell me, is this Christian to judge of God’s works by our thinking, and say, Children have not attained to reason, therefore they cannot believe? How if through this very reason you have already departed from faith, and the children come to faith through their unreason?...Man must first die to reason and become, as it were, a fool and even as unreasonable and unintelligent as a little child, if he is to become a believer and receive the grace of God.”\textsuperscript{188}

Similarly, Luther warns that feelings and the senses are in opposition to faith: “I have often said before that feeling and faith are two different things. It is the nature of faith not to feel, to lay aside reason and close the eyes...[F]eeling is opposed to faith and faith is opposed to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[182] Ibid., 192-193.
\item[183] Ibid., 193.
\item[184] Ibid., 218.
\item[185] Ibid., 219.
\item[186] Ibid., 225.
\item[187] Ibid., 309-310.
\item[188] Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 2, 87.
\end{footnotes}
feeling.\footnote{Ibid., 244.} Luther preaches that feelings of despair, sickness, poverty, sin, and death are not to be used as the measure of how things really are. The theology of the cross focuses on “Christ who died for your sake and rose again, and conquered every evil”\footnote{Ibid., 357.} and remains engendered by and oriented to the Word. Through the eyes of faith we see things as they really are.\footnote{Ibid., 246.}

However, Luther does not repudiate reason, feeling, or the senses completely. He maintains that the natural light of reason originated from God and only became corrupt through the Fall. God created human beings with the capacity to feel, to sense, and to think. In the wake of the Fall, reason is corrupt, but it is not destroyed by God. It still has the capacity to operate within the temporal world, but is unable to distinguish good from evil nor can it know God.\footnote{Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 190-191.} One can deduce some knowledge of a god from his works, but a definite knowledge of God himself is only revealed by the Holy Spirit.\footnote{Ibid., 8-9.} Therefore, reason and human wisdom cannot comprehend God nor grasp his divine truths.\footnote{Ibid., 7.} Similarly, it is not the case that reason is absolutely unable to differentiate right from wrong.\footnote{Fallen reason cannot distinguish good from evil but it can distinguish right from wrong. The latter is a moral category while the former is related to God. Only God can pronounce what is good and what is evil. Faith alone can grasp Jesus Christ as God-incarnate and through Him recognize good from evil.} It recognizes that murder, adultery, robbery, and other obvious sins are wrong, but when it comes to matters regarding God and salvation, reason always chooses works and ways which lead away from God.\footnote{Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 227-228.} Luther maintains that fallen reason is still salvageable. Reason, feeling, and the senses are not to be
discarded but restored to their right use. After one recognizes and accepts the divine light of Christ by faith, reason is restored to its original use.  

Again, while faith is contrary to all feeling and reason, it does not annihilate them; instead, it transforms them. “Thus faith leads us quietly, contrary to all feeling and comprehension of reason, through sin, through death and through hell. Then we shall see salvation before our eyes.” If we cling to the Word by faith, “reason will also follow; but if reason follows, everything will follow, desire and love and all that is in man.” It is not the case that faith annihilates reason and feeling; rather, on surrendering completely to the Word we receive a “different light, different feelings, different seeing, different hearing, acting and speaking.” In the wake of the Fall reason always pursues sin, but as we cling to the Word through faith, the integrity of our reason, feelings, and senses is restored so that they can once more function correctly. Our external circumstances, enemies, sickness, poverty, sin, death, and the devil remain, but we are able in the face of them to have inner peace, strength, and comfort. Thus Luther exhorts us to humble ourselves before God, who desires for the sinner to “bring his reason into captivity and be subject to divine truth.” This humble submission is a product of faith. Faith clings to God even when all external circumstances seem bleak. 

**The Holy Spirit quickens faith**

Finally, Luther maintains that faith, which is required to appropriate the Word, is given by the Holy Spirit and does not belong to us. Our faith, our ability to believe, comes only by

---

197 Ibid., 192. 
198 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 244. 
199 Ibid., 245-246. 
200 Ibid., 246. 
201 Ibid., 356-357. 
203 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 123.
divine grace. Luther upholds the sovereign and free choice of God to reveal himself to us. God initiates the first contact; he comes to us, seeks us, and finds us. Luther is adamant that we are not the ones seeking and finding God; rather, it is always God who takes the initiative; faith does not proceed from us but from God.

God’s revelation in his Word is the work of the Holy Spirit. Luther asserts that the Holy Spirit’s mission is to present Christ and his blessings to us, revealing them to us through the Gospel and impressing them on our hearts in order to make them ours.

Luther insists that both the written and preached Word come from the Holy Spirit. First, the written Word is the testimony of the Spirit’s teachings. The Holy Spirit teaches nothing but Christ, and this teaching is contained in the Scriptures. Luther maintains that the Holy Spirit teaches only truths from the Scriptures, and is also the One who elucidates these truths for us; the Spirit makes Christ known and makes the teachings of Christ clearer and plainer through the Scriptures. Luther insists that the Spirit “preaches nothing except concerning this Christ.” In fact, this is the criterion by which the spirits can be tested.

The Holy Spirit also convicts sinners. The sinner does not recognize his own sin; he mistakes sin for good works. The Holy Spirit makes known to the sinner through the Scriptures that what he takes to be good works are in fact sins.

Secondly, Luther notes that the Holy Spirit holds the office of the Word. The Spirit preaches the Word, and through the Word he brings comfort and truth to the hearer.

204 Luther, Sermons, vol. 1, 288.
205 Ibid., 26-27.
206 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 333.
207 Ibid., 334
209 Ibid., 165.
210 Ibid, 258.
211 Ibid., 116.
of God is first proclaimed to the disciples; their ability to understand it is attributed to the Holy Spirit, who also enables them to believe in Christ. It is the Spirit, too, who directs the apostles to preach the Word to the ends of the earth. While Luther holds a high view of preaching, he denies that preaching of the Word itself could be effective without the Spirit. He insists that even if the preacher preaches the pure Word, the hearer cannot truly hear it unless God puts it in her heart. Not only is Christ to be preached, he must also to be believed. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to “impress the preaching upon the heart”, enabling the hearer to believe and accept Christ.

Summary

Luther insists that “without faith we are simply blind.” The Scriptures “are not understood nor received except through faith in the Word,” and this faith is quickened by the Holy Spirit. Reason cannot understand nor grasp Scripture; God must “reveal it in [our] hearts by his Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is the “true interpreter” of Scripture. Again, it is not possible for us to understand the true meaning of the cross and suffering of Christ “unless God sink them into our hearts.” Faith in Jesus Christ cannot be secured by one’s own power, but is given by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit creates a new heart in the believer and this through the

\[\text{References}\]

\[\text{Ibid., 300-301.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 261-262.}\]
\[\text{Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 238.}\]
\[\text{Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 333.}\]
\[\text{Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 405.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 331-332.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 126-127.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 293.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 187-188.}\]
\[\text{Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 181-182.}\]
\[\text{Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 332.}\]
preaching of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{223} The Spirit then impresses the preaching upon this new heart and quickens faith in the heart, enabling the believer to appropriate Christ and the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 332
Chapter 3
The Soteriology of the Cross

In the proof for Thesis 27 of the *Heidelberg Disputation* Luther maintains that “Since Christ lives in us through faith so he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work, for the works which he does are the fulfilment of the commands of God given us through faith. If we look at them we are moved to imitate them….Thus deeds of mercy are aroused by the works through which he has saved us.”224 It is clear that for Luther, ethics is predicated on faith. Good works are aroused by Christ and through the saving work which Christ has first done for us. In Luther's view, love for the neighbour is the result of our faith in Christ. Justification is the presupposition of true Christian ethics. Therefore, we shall first explain Luther's soteriology of the cross before we begin to explore the ethics of the cross in the last three chapters.

In the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther distinguishes between the “theologian of the cross” and the “theologian of glory”. He insists that theologians of glory differ from theologians of the cross in the way they understand good and evil. They also differ in their understanding of God’s ordained way of salvation for fallen human beings. The former insist upon salvation by works while the latter rely only on the grace of God, a God who comes down, i.e., forges his path to us in order to save human beings. This distinction is fully reflected in the *Postils*. Although Luther does not use the explicit term “theologian of glory” in the *Postils*, he puts in this category all who seek to be justified by works.

A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil.

First, the theologians of glory and the theologians of the cross have entirely opposite ways of looking at the world. Their sense of good and evil are contrary to each other. The

---

theologians of glory approve of those who are wealthy, powerful, and honorable by worldly standards. They esteem those who speak religious words and appear proper in religious ceremonies. On the other hand, they despise those who are poor, suffering, or imprisoned. They reason that God would uphold those he favours and cast down those he despises. But Luther insists that, since God has chosen the contrarian way of the cross, “the rightful order of things is reversed: they who are God’s appear to be the devil’s, and the devil’s to be God’s.”

In the Postil on Romans 8, Luther states that the true children of God remain hidden to human eyes and reason. Indeed, Paul says that all creation moans and cries for the manifestation of the children of God. The theologians of glory are unable to discern the true children of God, for their identity will be revealed only at the eschaton. Luther describes people in this life as wearing a mask; each one appears other than her true self. Those who appear to be godly may actually be evil, and those who appear to be children of the devil may actually be the true children of God. The children of God, therefore, are often persecuted because of their uncomely appearance. Their only comfort is the knowledge that all suffering will end at the eschaton and the godless and the godly will be separated at that time. The true children of God will be vindicated by God himself.

In the Postil on Matthew 21, Luther points out that the theologians of glory call arrogance faith and faith arrogance. They reject God’s grace in favour of their own works, believing that it is arrogance to come before God empty-handed and that offering one’s own merit and works to God in order to win his favour is a sign of humility. But in fact, believing in the worthiness of

---

225 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 8, 111.
226 Ibid., 112.
227 Ibid., 114-118.
human works is true arrogance, and coming before God with nothing but faith in God’s mercy and grace is true humility.  

The theologians of glory refuse to accept that they are blind and are bound in sin. They refuse even to hear it; they shut their ears and condemn Christ and his teachings as evil. Luther is adamant that God “never assisted those who consider themselves strong and not forsaken. On the other hand, he never forsook those who were needy and desired his help.”

In the Postil for Epiphany, Luther introduces Herod as the type of all theologians of glory. Herod represents those who seek works and human doctrines, who appear to have found the way to heaven but in reality travel on the broad road to hell. Herod is pitted against Christ; they represent two spiritual kingdoms in opposition to each other. Herod represents the unbelievers, the ones Luther calls theologians of glory, while Christ represents the believers, the ones Luther calls the theologians of the cross. The theologians of glory oppose Christ just as Herod did. Just as Herod was unwilling to let another be king in his stead, the theologians of glory cannot allow Christ to be their Lord because they are unwilling to relinquish their precious works. Luther maintains that Christ does not have ambitions of his own but is content to let God’s will prevail, whereas Herod’s ambition is to do great things. Theologians of the cross must imitate Christ and let the theologians of glory follow in the steps of Herod.

Theologian of Glory vs Theologian of the Cross

In the Postil on Matthew 2:1–12, Luther describes the characteristics of theologians of glory:

---

228 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 22.
229 Ibid., 302.
230 Ibid., 302.
231 Ibid., 370.
232 Ibid., 370.
233 Ibid., 375.
1. They are well-pleased with themselves; they are satisfied with their deeds and think they are well on their way toward heaven.

2. They are haughty, exalting themselves above everyone else.

3. They are arrogant. While haughtiness describes the inner disposition of the heart, arrogance is the expression of haughtiness in external behaviours.

4. They are greedy. Luther levels this charge against many who become monks to gain material comfort.

5. They are slanderers, putting down others in order to raise themselves higher.

6. They are disobedient toward parents.

7. They are ungrateful towards God and others.

8. They neglect the holy things.

9. They do not care for others.

10. They refuse to help others.\textsuperscript{234}

In addition, Luther considers the theologians of glory to be excessive in conduct\textsuperscript{235} and insists that they seek material comfort.\textsuperscript{236} Shrinking from the true cross of suffering, they carry only the decorative cross and sing false praises to the Lord.\textsuperscript{237} While they do not deny that faith is required for salvation, they insist that faith alone is not enough; they preach that faith without works is useless and thereby leave faith behind in pursuit of works.\textsuperscript{238} Theologians of glory promote satisfaction for sin through money, penance, and religious orders, so that even while paying lip-service to grace, they undermine grace through their actions by building on a

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 379–390.
\textsuperscript{235} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 6, 20-22.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 22-23.
\textsuperscript{237} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 1, 401.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 408.
Theologians of glory cling to human goodness, refusing to accept that in the wake of the Fall, humans are totally depraved. They teach that human conscience is seriously weakened but not completely corrupted; it still has the ability to acquire grace and earn God’s favour, i.e., even the sinful conscience has inherent salvific capacity.

Theologians of glory also undermine love. They use the word often, but teach that love begins with the self—that loving oneself is natural and ought to be of the highest priority. As for loving others, as long as one wishes others well, that is love toward the neighbour, say the theologians of glory. They pay lip-service to God and his commands while undermining those very commands at every turn. Their teachings appear to be godly but are self-serving and promote the opposite of God’s commands.

In the Postil on John 10, Luther maintains that the theologians of glory always want to appear strong. Therefore, when they see people who are weak in faith, the theologians of glory insist that these weaker believers must strengthen their faith or be lost. Luther, however, maintains that the weak are to be comforted, not frightened into despair. He insists that Christ was rejected by those who regard themselves as irreproachable, wise, honorable, and holy: these are the theologians of glory who raise themselves up high, but reject Christ the Son of God on account of his lowliness.

Theologians of glory refuse to acknowledge Christ as their priest and king. In the Postil on John 14, Luther notes that the theologians of glory are always puzzled by Christ. They think he should make a display of his power and glory so that people will bow before him. They

---

239 Ibid., 409-410.
240 Ibid., 410
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
243 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 3, 22.
244 Ibid., 258-259.
245 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 1, 452.
are further puzzled by the fact that Christ only implores his followers to keep his commands, as if leaving it to men whether they choose to obey or not. Christ ought to demand obedience by force, say the theologians of glory, and bend the knees of his enemies with power; i.e., for theologians of glory lordship is equated with coercion. Yet this is not the way of the cross and not the way chosen by God.

In the Postil on John 15, Luther is adamant that theologians of glory and theologians of the cross are mutually exclusive groups. He insists that “you must be on one side or the other…the two divisions can never agree.” In the Postil on John 16, he distinguishes between the good man and the Christian. There are, he concedes, people who could be considered good, who receive and deserve the praises of the world. However, since the “good” man is still a child of Adam, “an earthly man under sin and death”, he is nevertheless a man bound for judgment if he is not a Christian. Here Luther indicates that the theologians of the cross, reflecting the gospel, have rejected without remainder a meritocracy with respect to moralism and legalism. On the other hand, a Christian is someone who “clings with his heart to this Savior,” and believes that Christ has given him the gift of salvation and life. The Christian realizes that this gift is pure grace from God, not achieved through works.

In the Postil on Romans 12, Luther further distinguishes between the theologians of glory and the theologians of the cross. The theologians of glory possess what Luther calls the “outward priesthood of dazzling character”. They are ordained according to human standards apart from the Word of God. They are well-pleased with their own work and expect praise from God and men alike. They secretly lust after evil desires and would never offer themselves to God as a sacrifice; rather, they prefer that all material goods, honour and praise be offered to them instead.

246 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 3, 270.
247 Ibid., 147-148.
of to God. They nail Christ back on the cross with their unbelief. The theologians of the cross, on the other hand, are called “the internal, spiritual priesthood”, a priesthood established by the Word of God. They cling to the grace of God, proclaim his glory, and offer their bodies to be sacrificed for God’s sake. They give up the lusts and desires of the world and allow themselves to be despised and hated. They look to the atonement of Christ as the only sufficient sacrifice made for their sins.\textsuperscript{248}

In the \textit{Postil} on Luke 16, contrasting the rich man and Lazarus, Luther maintains that the rich man represents unbelievers (theologians of glory) while Lazarus represents believers (theologians of the cross). The rich man is not accused of any obvious sins; he must be regarded by the reader as someone who has kept the law and has “led outwardly an exemplary, holy life.”\textsuperscript{249} Yet he is condemned because of his unbelief. Such unbelief is not a problem of the head but of the heart. It is not the non-espousal of religious concepts but the refusal to fear, obey and trust God.\textsuperscript{250} Like all theologians of glory, he is proud of his honour in life, but does not understand that unbelief is the greatest and indeed the only sin. Luther observes that theologians of glory have honest jobs, raise a proper family, and act like upstanding citizens. However, they are unwilling to leave these things for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.\textsuperscript{251} Theologians of the cross, on the other hand, trust in God\textsuperscript{252} and God’s promise completely. They are willing to leave even wife and child if the Lord demands.

The theologian of the cross is willing to deny herself and take up the cross according to the example of her master Jesus Christ. Luther maintains that being a true follower of Christ “costs

\textsuperscript{248} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 7, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{249} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 4, 18.
\textsuperscript{250} cf the \textit{Small Catechism} under the First Commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods. What does this mean? Answer. We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{252} For Luther and all of the Magisterial Reformers, \textit{Fiducia} (trust) is self-abandoning reliance on God’s fulfillment of his promises.
life, property, honor, friends and all worldly things.” Furthermore, followers of Christ accept “pain instead of pleasure, loss instead of gain, shame rather than honor, enemies rather than friends,” suffering all of these willingly because of the cross of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{253} The theologian of the cross has no need of self-aggrandizement, for she is justified by the grace of God through faith. She has appropriated Christ the Righteous One, and with him all his benefits: right-relatedness to God, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. She is content to serve God in the vocation given to her. She is ready to love and serve her neighbour through the various stations she occupies in her life.\textsuperscript{254}

**The Cross repudiates works righteousness**

In the *Postil* on John 3, Luther points to Nicodemus as a model of the theologian of glory. Nicodemus is a highly esteemed man: he is a wise Pharisee, lives a holy life according to the Law, and is a member of the Sanhedrin—a ruler.\textsuperscript{255} In addition, Nicodemus is not an enemy of Christ; unlike other Pharisees and members of the Sanhedrin, he does not despise nor persecute Christ. In other words, he is really a “good” man according to human standards. Yet Luther maintains that no matter how pious Nicodemus is, no matter how many good works he performs, he is not nearer to the kingdom than the publican. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he needs to be born again, to become a new and different person in order to enter the kingdom of God. Luther concludes that salvation is a matter not of what one does, but of what one must become: one must be born again.\textsuperscript{256} Luther notes that Christ’s conversation with Nicodemus is a call to repentance, that “about-face” illustrated in Luther’s beloved Hebrew Bible as an adulterous woman returning to her husband, an idol-worshipper returning to the true and living God and a

\textsuperscript{253} Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7, 9.
\textsuperscript{254} Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 8, 287-288.
\textsuperscript{255} Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 422-423.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 426-427.
rebel returning to their rightful ruler. Christ preaches the Law to the sinner, exposing his sin and shutting the door on works righteousness.²⁵⁷

In the Postil on the Pharisee and the publican, Luther cites the Pharisee as an example of the theologian of glory. The Pharisee prizes his works and merit, but has no faith, while the faith of the publican is the sole ground of his justification. Here Luther isn’t thereby subtly rendering faith a work; rather, faith lets go all claims to spiritual sufficiency and pleads only God’s mercy. The Pharisee is a truly good person: his works are genuinely good. However, he is deluded in thinking that his good works are thereby godly and possess salvific significance, that he has therefore no need of God and that he is worthy of God’s favour. The Pharisee is condemned by the unbelief of his heart, the defiance of God, the disdain and disobedience with respect to the gospel. Law-obedience is categorically different from the obedience of faith. That, Luther maintains, is the real sin compared to which all other outward sins are insignificant.

Luther further condemns the Pharisee for neglecting the neighbour. In his arrogance, the Pharisee believes himself to be worthy of God’s favour and despises the publican who does not display the same outward piety. Ignoring his duty to love the publican, the Pharisee praises his own works and condemns the neighbour. The publican, on the other hand, is without any merit and claims none; he throws himself on the mercy of the Lord by faith.²⁵⁸ Luther explains that it is not works that justify a person, for a person must first be good, i.e., godly, before she can do good works: good works, Luther insists, are the fruits of justification, not the cause. “‘A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit’; and again, ‘An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.’ Thus a man must first be good before he can do good.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 427-428.
²⁵⁸ Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 4, 337.
²⁵⁹ Ibid., 338.
Luther distinguishes between two kinds of righteousness. The first is what the Pharisee relies on, his own works. These works appear to all the world to be perfect, yet are worth nothing before God. The second kind of righteousness is the kind that God gives on account of faith. This is the faith of the publican: though he has done no worthy works, he is accounted righteous because of his faith.\footnote{Ibid., 348.} Luther maintains that the appearance of piety has no salvific value. The publican is a sinner according to outward appearances; anyone who judged his works would find only sin, whereas the Pharisee appears pious and his works appear good. Yet God, who examines the heart, pronounces the Pharisee a sinner and the publican justified, i.e., rightly related to God. This is completely contrary to reason and outward appearances.\footnote{Ibid.} Luther insists that when a person trusts in his own works rather than God, he has broken the first commandment by making idols of his works, and indeed of himself, “as though he were the excellent holy man, whom alone God is bound to respect and honor.”\footnote{Ibid., 354.} Luther concludes that since such a person has broken the first commandment, refusing to allow God to be God, he cannot keep any of the other commandments.

Luther maintains that the publican must have first learned of God’s Word before his faith was quickened: “God must first let his Word sound in our hearts by which we learn to know and to believe him, and afterwards do good works.”\footnote{Ibid., 339.} The theologian of the cross, like the publican, calls a thing what it is: he admits to being a sinner and confesses the truth, that he has done nothing but sin before God. He expects and accepts God’s righteous judgment and humbly casts himself down before God. This realization of one’s utter sinfulness is the “true fruit of faith.”\footnote{Ibid., 339-340.}
Luther does not one-sidedly stress justification by faith. He upholds equally the value of works, but not as a way to earn merit before God. Works done without faith are worthless; however, after one is justified through faith, such true faith is expressed in good works. Luther affirms the teaching of Luke and James that faith is not merely “on the lips as the foam on the water”, but bears fruit in good works. One can see in the believer’s “changed conduct, manner and life that he believes.” While faith alone is what saves us, works are necessary as a witness to our faith. Luther points out that Christians must avoid the two extremes: on the one hand, of saying that a person need only believe, without encouraging good works as the fruit of faith; and on the other hand, of saying that one must work to earn God’s favour. Luther is adamant that “faith alone must make us good and save us. But to know whether faith is right and true, you must show it by your works.” Succinctly, while faith alone renders us rightly related to God, authentic faith is never alone, never unexpressed in “doing the truth.”

**Word as Law and Gospel**

Luther teaches that the Word of God consists of the two-fold message of the Law and the Gospel, which should be carefully distinguished and properly explained. Luther maintains that the Law and the Gospel are found in every book of the Bible, that God has always placed them side by side in his Word. Luther calls the Law the office of Moses, which belongs to the Old Testament, and he calls the Gospel the office of Christ, which is the New Testament. While the Gospel is more glorious than the Law, they nevertheless belong inseparably to each other and are both the Word of God. Conceding that not all of the Old Testament is Law, or all of the New Testament Gospel, Luther encourages the believer to read all the books of the Bible diligently

---

265 Ibid., 341.
266 Ibid., 342.
267 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 96.
268 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 8, 224-225.
with this distinction in mind.

Luther equates the Gospel to the promise of God. God “teaches by the law what we are to do, and by the promises whence we shall receive power to do it.” Whenever “promises are made in a book, it is a Gospel-book; when commandments are given, it is a law-book.” He further explains that because the Law is predominant in the Old Testament and promises are abundant in the New Testament, he calls the former the Law and the latter the Gospel.

In the first Postil on Luke 10, Luther affirms that “the entire Scriptures consist of two parts, of the Law and the Gospel.” Again in the second Postil on Matthew 22, Luther exhorts preachers to preach only two types of sermon: the Law and the Gospel. The Law and the Gospel are inseparable, and God has ordained that they be preached together; if either is neglected, the message of salvation is distorted. On the other hand, whenever one of them is properly preached, it leads naturally to the other. In fact, Luther maintains, the Law and the Gospel were given together from the beginning of time, starting from Adam. It is the Law and the Gospel together that lead to repentance and forgiveness, says Luther, refuting the “wise” philosophers and theologians who teach that reason will lead to good works. Sinners are unable to reach heaven unless and until God takes the first step and sends out the Word. God’s Word first destroys the confidence of the sinner by exposing his sins, and then offers the grace of the Gospel. God always works to destroy faith in oneself and offer salvation through faith in Christ.

---

269 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 1, 100.
270 Ibid. Even though Luther’s exposition of Scriptures finds the Gospel everywhere.
271 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 5, 31.
272 Ibid., 185.
273 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 4, 53-54.
274 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 3, 396.
275 Ibid., 398.
Luther outlines the process whereby salvation is offered: God the Father takes the first step toward humankind by sending preachers to preach the Word. The Law is preached first, condemning as sin all the works we thought were holy and pious, and then the grace of God is offered through the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news that while all we can offer to God are sin and abomination, God is still kindly disposed toward us and is willing to adopt us as his children through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Luther asserts that when we hear this Gospel, we hear the personal voice of Christ, and are therefore comforted that God is merciful and gracious to us. Luther criticizes the theologians of glory for teaching the Law in a way that misleads, promoting adherence to the Law in order to gain merit before God instead of allowing the Law to lead to faith in Christ. In the Postil on Luke 2, Luther maintains that Old Testament saints were not saved by keeping the law but by faith. He insists that these saints did not “believe that they were justified by works”; they kept the law only after they were justified by faith. Luther refutes those who adduce the prophetess Anna as proof that fulfilling the Law is the way to salvation, and cites the example of Paul: while Paul fulfilled the law externally, his heart clung to faith. It is by faith that he was justified. He voluntarily fulfilled the law after he was justified.

The Law

In the second Postil on Luke 5, Luther distinguishes between the preaching of the Law and the preaching of the Gospel. Whenever our sins and God’s wrath are preached, the Law is

276 Ibid., 399-401.
277 Note that for Luther, any one biblical text can function either as Law or Gospel. For instance, “Come unto me, all who labor and are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt 11:28) is commonly read as gracious invitation; it is the Gospel. The grammatical form however, is the imperative: the sinner must come to Christ, it is also the Law.
278 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 8, 224.
279 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 1, 290.
280 Ibid., 288-290.
preached, and whenever grace and forgiveness in Christ are preached, the Gospel is being presented. Luther notes that since the Law brings judgment to the sinner, it generates fear in us; but the Gospel offers grace and thus instills confidence that we have been made righteous by the atonement of Christ.

In the Postil on Matthew 2, Luther defines the Law as “that word by which God teaches what we shall do.” If we observed the Law completely, we would be perfectly righteous; however, asserts Luther, it is impossible for fallen human beings to keep the Law without the aid of God’s grace. Luther affirms that after the Fall, all human beings are totally depraved, unwilling and unable to observe the Law. All sinners love to sin but hate the punishment, declares Luther, so that even when the sinner does try to observe the Law, it is only because he fears the punishment for disobedience. This only adds to our sins, because God who sees inside our hearts judges the inward motive as well as the outward work.

In the first Postil on Luke 14, Luther cautions against a misinterpretation of the Law as regulating only outward actions. He maintains that the Law is to be seen through the lens of love: “love is to be the interpreter of law,” he writes. In other words, the Law is fulfilled only if obedience is motivated by love; “where there is no love,” says Luther, “these things are meaningless.” Christ did not tear down the Law; rather, he changed our hearts so that we might observe the Law willingly. Nevertheless, Luther does not one-sidedly emphasize the heart; he also cautions against the other extreme to which the theologians of glory resort—namely, to announce that only the heart matters, not the external behavior, all of this when the

---

281 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, 158.
282 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 214.
283 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 369-370.
284 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5, 161.
285 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 275.
heart is corrupted in any case. He denounces as hypocrites those who compete to occupy the place of honour, all the while professing humility of heart. It is true that external behaviour without inner love is meaningless, but inner humility necessarily expresses itself in outward behaviour: good fruit does not always by itself indicate a good tree, but bad fruit is a sure indication of a bad tree.  

Luther insists that the Law must be kept both inwardly and outwardly in heart and in life. One should keep the Law with a “happy, free and willing” heart. When the Law is kept outwardly without inward willingness, it is considered by God as not done at all. Sinners are unable to fulfill the Law because they are unwilling to observe it.  

One may inquire, then, what purpose the Law serves, since all human beings are depraved and unable to perform it. Luther explains that the first use of the Law is to preserve civil society by restraining people from committing crimes against one another. Without the Law, sinful human beings may very well destroy each other and even the world. The second use of the Law, according to Luther, is to enable sinners to realize their sinfulness and humble themselves before God. Luther insists that the theologians of glory, whom he calls “false saints”, observe the Law only in regard to its first use, while neglecting to use the Law as a mirror to discover their own sinfulness. The true saints, on the other hand, the theologians of the cross, recognize their own depravity through the Law and therefore deny, correctly, that they have the natural capacity to observe it. They realize that only faith can free them from the Law. This freedom is not licence to commit sins indiscriminately, cautions Luther; freedom from the Law means freedom to observe it out of love.  

---

286 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5, 167-168.  
287 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 97.  
288 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 271.  
289 Ibid., 271-272.  
290 Ibid., 276-277.  
291 Ibid., 281-282.
Luther emphasizes again and again the importance of the second use of the Law: In the first Postil on Galatians 4, he reiterates that the Law’s function is to expose sinners and their iniquities. In the Postil on Matthew 5:20–26, he compares the Law to a mirror allowing us to see ourselves truly as we are: filthy and wicked sinners. In the first Postil on Matthew 22, he insists that the Law is preached rightly only when the hearer understands that the Law cannot be fulfilled because all sinners are “property of the devil.” And in the first Postil on Luke 7, Luther maintains that the Law reveals sin: it makes us realize that we have sinned and are condemned. It “kills” us in the sense that we realize the justice of our condemnation and the inevitability of our death. Luther even describes the preachers of the Law as pallbearers putting sinners into their graves.

Sinners are naturally inclined to sin, maintains Luther; no amount of teaching, training, inducements, or punishments can change corrupt human nature. He uses the example of the repressed youth who, no matter how strictly brought up at home, becomes more heinous than all other young people as soon as the opportunity comes. Luther asserts that the function of the Law intended by God is to drive us to the brink of despair by revealing to us the extent of our sins and depravity. When the Law is properly preached, the hearer is brought low and humiliated so that he no longer clings to his works. The sinner finally realizes that all his motives are sinful, that all his works count for nothing before God, and that it is impossible for him to love God and do good to his neighbour. This is a necessary first step, insists Luther: before a person can become spiritual he must first be condemned by the Law, whereupon he begins to long for

292 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 233-234.
293 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, 170.
294 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5, 178.
295 Ibid., 136-137.
296 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 268.
forgiveness. The Law “kills and condemns” the natural, sinful being with all its pride and self-righteousness before the Gospel forges a new and spiritual being.\textsuperscript{297} Only when the sinner is driven to the brink of despair is the true function of the Law served.\textsuperscript{298}

The second purpose of the Law is served through faith. In the \textit{Postil} on Luke 2, Luther points out that while the Law teaches us about our sinnership, this truth is only appropriated by faith. Faith “immediately teaches that everything human is nothing before God. Hence [sinners] despise self and think nothing of themselves.” When the Law is preached and heard through the ears of faith, the sinner acknowledges his sinfulness and humbles himself before God.

While the Law is necessary to bring sinners to a realization of their sinnership and condemnation before God, it is incomplete by itself; it only prepares the way for the Gospel. In the \textit{Postil} on John 1, Luther compares John the Baptist to the Law and Christ to the Gospel. The work of John the Baptist, who came to prepare the way for the Lord, is to expose the world and make people realize that they are sinners. John is the model for all preachers, who must preach the Law in order that all may realize their sinfulness, humble themselves before God, and confess their sinnership.\textsuperscript{299} Even those who appear to be pious, holy, and honorable are nothing but “lost, damned, poor, miserable, pitiable people”; John exposes their sins so that their hearts may be prepared for the coming of the Saviour and they will be ready to accept God’s grace offered through the Gospel.\textsuperscript{300} In the \textit{Postil} on John 10, Luther affirms again that God has given two distinct yet related proclamations: the Law and the Gospel.\textsuperscript{301} Preachers are cautioned not to preach the Law one-sidedly, lest the preaching of judgment terrorize people into despair without

\textsuperscript{297} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 1, 291.
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid., 130-133.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid., 124.
\textsuperscript{301} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 3, 18-19.
offering the possibility of escape. In the Postil on John 3, Luther points to Christ as the example of balanced teaching, for Christ “presents the judgment and threatens men, but at the same time he tells them how they may flee from wrath.”

Fear of judgment alone will not turn the sinner toward God; on the contrary, maintains Luther, when a sinner realizes her sin but finds no way out, she comes to hate God and lives in despair. In the first Postil on Matthew 9, Luther describes the utter despair of the sinner who has yet to learn of the Gospel: such a sinner tries in vain to atone for his own sin, unaware that even his attempts to do good are sinful; i.e., conviction of sinnership drives one to “try harder”, and thereby confirm one in his sinnership. Only when Christ comes in the form of the Gospel can the sinner rid himself of sin.

The Gospel

In the first Postil on Isaiah 60:1–6, Luther differentiates Gospel from Law. As we have seen, the Law reveals our sins and God’s wrath against us. The Gospel, on the other hand, announces the good news of forgiveness and redemption through Jesus Christ. Luther insists that the Gospel must be preached after the Law, for the knowledge of sin alone has no salvific value if the Gospel is not preached. The Gospel is a “comforting doctrine”: it allows us to leave our own works and arrogance behind and embrace the grace of God. Luther defines the Gospel as God’s offer of his blessings, the promise of our deliverance from his wrath, and the forgiveness of our sins.

---

302 Ibid., 346.
303 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 5, 336-337.
304 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 6, 311-312.
305 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 5, 180-181.
306 Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 1, 442-443.
307 Ibid., 99-100.
Luther states that the cross of Jesus makes it apparent that God does not intend to condemn us but to save us through his Son.\(^{308}\) God’s love for the world is shown in the fact that he sent his Son to save it. He did not love the world because it is lovable; on the contrary, the world is full of contempt, blasphemy, disobedience, and stupendous ingratitude for all the gifts God has bestowed upon it, giving him every reason to hate the world and condemn it to hell. Yet he sent his Son to save the world. Luther marvels that God’s love swallows up all our sins. God’s gift of grace “is much greater, transcends and is mightier, than all the sins on earth, so that the unworthiness of any man, yes of all men together, aye the eternal wrath and condemnation which they have deserved, cannot be so great that the greatness of this love and grace, or forgiveness, does not in every particular outweigh, yes, engulf them.”\(^{309}\)

In the Postil on Matthew 21:1–9, Luther describes the soothing effect of the Gospel. After the preaching of the Law has brought fear to the sinner, fear of God’s wrath and condemnation, Christ in the form of the Gospel soothes the sinner: “he acts as if he were sorry ever to have made you afraid and caused you to flee from his punishment and wrath. He desires to reassure and comfort you and bring you to himself by love and kindness.”\(^{310}\) Luther insists that to preach Christ rightly is to console the sin-burdened conscience; it is to preach a comforting message of hope and salvation.

Luther calls the Gospel a “sermon whose theme is Christ.”\(^{311}\) He is adamant that the Gospel always points to Christ, and that it is not possible to find Christ anywhere except where the Gospel is preached.\(^{312}\) The content of the Gospel is Christ given for us and to us in his death

---

\(^{308}\) Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 353.

\(^{309}\) Ibid., 357.

\(^{310}\) Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 29.

\(^{311}\) Ibid., 260.

\(^{312}\) Ibid., 443-444. For Luther (as for Calvin), “Gospel” means “Gospel preached”; i.e., proclamation inheres the Gospel. Also for Luther, the sermon is “Christ coming to us.”
and resurrection. Christ is a gift given to us, declares Luther. To know Christ truly is to know that God has given us, out of his graciousness, Christ and all that belongs to him. In the first Postil on Galatians 3, Luther states his famous thesis of the “sweet exchange” between Christ and the sinner. When we accept Christ, we put on Christ. Everything that belongs to him, including his righteousness, belongs to us; we are reckoned as righteous in God’s eyes. Meanwhile, everything which belonged to us, including all our sins, now belongs to Christ; he is made sin for our sake.

In the second Postil on Matthew 22:34–46, Luther explains how the Gospel announces the good news that faith in Jesus Christ restores the sinner to a state whereby she can love God and her neighbour from her heart. Anyone who believes will be saved.

Word as Christ pro me

In the Postil on Matthew 21:1–9, Luther differentiates between real faith and false faith. False “faith” consists merely of intellectual knowledge about Christ, and “faith” is merely a matter of concepts. Perhaps you even believe that Christ is a Saviour for others. But it is false, Luther insists, because it is not a faith in Christ; it is not a faith in Christ pro me. Even the devils and evil men have this false kind of “faith”. Real faith is when you believe without wavering that Christ is the Saviour not only to Peter and to the saints, but also to you. In the Postil for Luke 2:1–14, Luther again teaches that you have proper faith when you “firmly believe that Christ is born for you.” In fact, Christ was born for us. Luther maintains that Christ absorbs our birth in

313 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 39-40.
314 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 289-290.
315 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5, 187.
316 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 20-22. See Luther’s “faith resides in the personal pronouns.” Cf Victor Shepherd’s *Interpreting Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Thought*, 160. In addition, Luther’s insistence on cleaving to the “voice” of Christ is not to be overlooked. Only as we hear through the proclamation of the Gospel, Christ-in-person speaking to us, will we surrender ourselves to him.
317 Ibid., 143.
his birth and grants us his in order that “we might become pure and holy”; this is the “sweet exchange” between Christ and us. Luther maintains that true faith is not only believing that Christ is God but that he is “a gracious God to me”, and that on the cross an exchange has taken place whose result is that my sin is now Christ’s and his righteousness mine.\textsuperscript{318} True faith is not merely correct doctrine about Christ, about his being both God and man; it is rather to believe that he became man and died \textit{for us}.\textsuperscript{319} And again with regard to Christ’s resurrection, Luther insists that true faith is not simply a belief that Christ was raised, as historical fact; rather, we must believe that Christ’s death and resurrection is \textit{for us}. He died for us so as to overcome sin and death on our behalf.\textsuperscript{320} In the first \textit{Postil} on John 3:16–21, Luther emphasizes again the importance of a faith in Christ for me. It is not the fear of judgment that leads to salvation; fear of judgment only brings hatred from sinners. But when we sinners realize that Christ died for us, our fear is alleviated and we are saved through faith.\textsuperscript{321}

\textbf{The Gospel is received through faith}

Luther insists that Christ not only saves us through his death and resurrection, he offers himself to us: we can appropriate him in faith so that “whatever he is and has may be ours.”\textsuperscript{322} Luther exhorts sinners not to believe that the Gospels are only historical facts, nor to regard Christ only as an example; to do so without faith is worthless. Faith alone appropriates Christ and makes him our own.\textsuperscript{323} But while faith is necessary to appropriate salvation, it is not a work that we can do, nor does it merit salvation; God is always the active giver. He bestows salvation as a gift, and this gift can be received only by faith. Faith is passive with respect to receiving the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{318} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 3, 125-127.
  \item \textsuperscript{319} Ibid., 174-175.
  \item \textsuperscript{320} Ibid., 199-200.
  \item \textsuperscript{321} Ibid., 344-345.
  \item \textsuperscript{322} Luther, \textit{Sermons of Martin Luther}, vol. 1, 27.
  \item \textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 144.
\end{itemize}
gift, it does nothing of itself, but merely receives the gracious gift offered to us. Far from being mere affirmation of an intellectual proposition, it is the embracing of the Son of God with one’s heart.

Faith cannot see nor sense what is promised, but clings to the One who promises.

Luther insists that the faith of Older Testament saints and that of New Testament saints is essentially the same; the former looks forward to the future fulfillment of the promise, while the latter looks back to the fulfillment of the promise on the cross, but they have the same object: Christ. Christ is presented to the saints of the Old Testament through his word and external signs. The word of promise is given from the beginning: already in Genesis 3, God promises that the seed of the woman will bruise the serpent’s head. Luther declares this to be the promise that Christ “shall come to conquer sin, death and Satan for us”. Signs are also given: the sacrificial system and even things like the material rock are signs of the coming Christ. It is through the word and signs that the promise came and the Old Testament saints believed in Christ, but Luther insists on the priority of the Word. Faith must cling to the Word of God, without which signs may lead to temporary wonderment but do not profit the soul.

**The Gospel is received with the aid of the Holy Spirit**

Lastly, Luther maintains that mere preaching, even preaching of the Word, is not enough without the aid of the Holy Spirit. Even when the living Word is preached, the sinner who is dead in sin cannot respond unless the Holy Spirit “impresses this preaching upon the heart, so

---

324 Elsewhere, Luther will insist that faith is always active; it never fosters passivity.  
325 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 360-361.  
326 Ibid.  
327 Ibid., 367.  
328 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 12-13.  
329 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7, 98-99.  
330 Ibid., 101.
that it abides there and lives.”

The Holy Spirit transforms the person through the living Word; as the Word is preached, the Holy Spirit “streams into the heart and makes a new man, one who now loves God and gladly does his will.” The Holy Spirit writes the Law in the heart and kindles a love towards God. Indeed, the Holy Spirit’s office is to impress Christ upon our hearts and to give Christ and all he has to us. The Holy Spirit always teaches about Christ and illumines Christ’s teachings for us so that we may believe, and believe “fully.”

The Holy Spirit leads the heart to believe in Christ through the Word that it hears, and in so doing transforms the heart into one that confesses sins, seeks the glory of God, and “endeavors to live without giving offense, to serve others and to be obedient, patient, pure and chaste, mild and gentle.”

To summarize, the cross not only reveals God to us in Christ, as we saw in chapter two, it also reveals our sinnership and God’s salvation. The fact that Christ died on the cross for us reveals the depth of our sinnership. No works done by the sinner could be called “good” since that would suggest they are done in order to earn salvation rather than in humble obedience to God. Luther maintains that all of our best works are still sinful. The preaching of the Law and the Gospel reveals both the human sinnership and God’s salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ. When the sinner throws herself at the mercy of God by faith, a faith which is quickened by the Holy Spirit, she is pronounced to be just coram Deo.

---

331 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 279.
332 Ibid., 277.
333 Ibid., 284.
334 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 8, 173.
Chapter 4
The Ethics of the Cross

While “good works” for the purpose of gaining salvation is categorically rejected by Luther, he does not reject the doing of good works per se. Rather, good works are done as the implicate of salvation by faith. The theology of the cross is not concerned only with epistemology: how we know God and gain the knowledge of what is real (chapter two), or with soteriology (chapter three), the way to salvation, it is concerned with all of life including the Christian’s life after justification.

Luther states in the proof for Thesis 27 of the Heidelberg Disputation: “Since Christ lives in us through faith so he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work, for the works which he does are the fulfilment of the commands of God given us through faith. If we look at them we are moved to imitate them….Thus deeds of mercy are aroused by the works through which he has saved us.”

For Luther, the cross reveals not only our sinnership for which Christ died, it also reveals our proper ethical orientation on earth: to love our neighbour in the imitation of Christ. Just as Christ loves us and gave himself for us, we are moved by his love to love others. The Scriptures also exhort us to imitate Christ and his love. All we do for others we do for the sake of love. This love of the neighbour is aroused through faith by the saving works of Christ.

In the following chapters we will delve into Luther’s ethics as expounded in the Postils. While the Heidelberg Disputation writes little on ethics except for the overall orientation of love, the Postils includes much more theoretical and practical admonition. The present chapter will explain in detail the source, motivation and model of the ethics of the cross. In chapter five, we

---

will examine the cross-bearing dimension of Christian faith and in chapter six, we will discuss the outer expression of *theologia crucis* in both the civic and spiritual realm.

Luther stresses Christian love just as much as he emphasizes faith. Faith and Love are inseparable, like the two sides of the same coin. Love is made possible by faith and is the natural expression of true faith. We are commanded to love God and love our neighbors. Luther maintains that since God lacks nothing, he does not require our love but he directs our love for him towards our neighbors. Therefore, love of the neighbour is an expression of our love for God, and a Christian who loves God naturally loves the neighbor. Luther also insists that Christ is the model for all Christians. We should learn to love the neighbor as Christ loved us. Let us first examine the relationship between Faith and Love.

**The Cross defines what “good” works are**

In the first *Postil* on 1 Corinthians 1:4–9 Luther maintains that the true Christian, who is illumined by the Holy Spirit, is able to discern what are truly good works pleasing to God and what are only self-serving works.\(^{336}\) False Christians, the theologians of glory, are not able to discern which works are truly pleasing to God. Their judgment is clouded by sin and is thus always self-serving. According to Luther they have “sought comfort and salvation in self-devised trivialities, in penances, confessions and satisfactions, in self-righteous works of monkery and in obedience to the commands of the Pope.”\(^{337}\) Elsewhere Luther expounds that the sinner always rationalizes his sinful behaviour, imagining that he is justified in all he does and that he is a Christian who pleases God. He is the theologian of glory who calls evil good: “haughtiness, greed, oppressing and tormenting the poor, wrath, envy—all this he would call preserving his

---

\(^{336}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 297.

\(^{337}\) Ibid.
dignity, exercising strict discipline, honestly and economically conducting his domestic affairs, caring for his wife and children, displaying Christian zeal and love of justice, etc.”

Luther affirms justification by faith as the core of the gospel; this focus is evident in the *Heidelberg Disputation*. The cross, which is God’s chosen way of revealing himself to humankind, destroys any notion of salvation by works. In light of the necessity of the suffering and death of Christ for our salvation, we can claim no merit through our works; even our good works need to be redeemed. On the other hand, while the cross reveals God’s judgment on sin, it also reveals his mercy toward humankind, and by clinging to this mercy through faith we are saved. Furthermore, the cross reveals the kind of work which all Christians should do: love toward the neighbour as Christ loves us. The cross reveals Christ’s self-sacrificial love for humankind. This is also the Christian’s ethical orientation in life. Luther’s *Postils* places equal emphasis on the significance of the cross for our exercise of love toward our neighbour.

**Faith and Love**

Luther insists that all the Gospels teach both faith and love. In *Postil* after *Postil* he applies the lesson of the Scripture passage first to faith and then to love. In his *Postil* on the healing of the blind man, for instance, Luther preaches that “this Gospel presents to us again the two thoughts of faith and love.” In explaining the passage where Jesus casts out the demon from a dumb and blind man, Luther maintains that “in the first place, like all the Gospels this one teaches us faith and love.” And in his *Postil* on John 20:19–31, Luther explains that “in today’s Gospel is presented to us, what the life of a Christian is to be and that it consists of two parts…faith and love, the two thoughts that are preached to us in all the Gospel texts.” Later on in the same *Postil* he says, “thus then you have finely portrayed in this Gospel, as in almost all

---

338 Ibid., 307.
the Gospel lessons, these two thoughts, faith and love.” In the first Postil on Matthew 6:24–34, Luther maintains that the Christian character consists of faith and love,\(^{339}\) and in the first Postil on Luke 14:1–11, he once again insists that faith and love are the two ingredients of the Gospel.\(^{340}\) Again and again, Luther maintains that the Christian life is “wholly contained” in faith and love.\(^{341}\) In the first Postil on Luke 17:11–19, Luther mentions no fewer than three times that the two chief things in a Christian life are faith and love.\(^{342}\)

Many Postils are divided logically by these two elements. Luther often begins the Postil by explaining how the passage is related to faith and then goes on to expound its relation to love. In the Postil on Luke 2:1–14, Luther maintains that the Gospel is nothing but faith and love; we are to have faith in Christ and love our neighbours.\(^{343}\) In the Postil on Matthew 21:1–9, Luther insists that all the Gospel lessons teach first of faith and then of good works.\(^{344}\) He maintains that a complete Christian life is constituted by faith and love. In the Postil on Matthew 2:2–10, Luther declares that the Gospels teach us the two doctrines of faith and love: “Faith receives the good works of Christ, love bestows good works on our neighbour.”\(^{345}\) In the second Postil on Mark 16:14–20, Luther maintains once again that the essence of a Christian’s life is faith and love, and that this is taught constantly in the Gospels.\(^{346}\) In the second Postil on Mark 7:31–37, Luther insists that “a Christian life consists” entirely in faith in Christ and love towards the

\(^{339}\) Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5, 112.

\(^{340}\) Ibid., 159.

\(^{341}\) Ibid., 70.

\(^{342}\) Ibid., 100.

\(^{343}\) Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 146.

\(^{344}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{345}\) Ibid., 109.

\(^{346}\) Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 196.
neighbour, and elsewhere we find him stating that faith in Christ and love for the neighbour are together “the whole Scripture in its briefest form”.

The same twofold emphasis is found in Luther’s Postils on the epistles. In the first Postil on Titus 3:4–8, he affirms yet again that faith and love are the two principles enforced by all of Scripture, and is emphatic that “all Christian doctrines and works, all Christian living, is briefly, clearly and completely comprehended in these two principles, faith and love.” It is through faith that we become sons of God, he explains, and through faith that we are made heirs to all God’s divine blessings; at the same time, we are “gods” to our neighbour through love. Luther is not claiming here that we become God in our essence; he is affirming that “the divine nature is simply pure beneficence,” and that as we pour out blessing upon our neighbours in love, we are extending the very love of Christ to the neighbour.

In the first Postil on 1 Corinthians 13, Luther maintains that faith and love cannot be separated. The Holy Spirit kindles a fire in us to love and to do God’s commandments, imparting love together with faith so that “where true faith is, the Holy Spirit dwells; and where the Holy Spirit is, there must be love.” Love is essential to faith, declares Luther; without love, faith is nothing. At the same time, faith cannot be collapsed into love, for faith necessarily precedes love logically: without faith one cannot be justified, and without justification one has no ability to love. Luther maintains that faith and love interact thus: “faith incites love, and love increases faith.” In other words, the stronger one’s faith, the more willing one is to love the

---

347 Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, 381.
348 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 151.
349 Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 145.
350 Ibid., 146.
351 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 189.
352 Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7, 122–23.
353 Ibid., 125.
neighbour; and conversely, the more one loves the neighbour, the stronger one’s faith will grow.  

In the Postil on Ephesians 3:13–21 Luther insists that “wherever the Word of God is proclaimed, the fruits of the same must exist.” The Holy Spirit instils faith in us, and the fruit of that faith is love: while faith sets us right before God, love “shows whether or not faith is real.” Love is the expression of faith in word and deed; it is the result of our being filled to the utmost with God. We are so “permeated with him until every word, thought and deed, the whole life in fact, be utterly godly.”

In the first Postil on Luke 17:11–19, Luther describes the relationship connecting faith, love, and hope. Faith appropriates Christ and trusts not in our works but in the grace and mercy of God alone. Love is the natural result of faith: since we possess Christ and all that belongs to him through faith, we no longer focus on our own needs and can focus on the needs of others. God teaches us to love God and to love our neighbour. God does not need anything from us but directs us to love our neighbor; we immerse ourselves in love toward the neighbour as an expression of our love for God. This love is expressed in active service of the neighbour. Such love for God and neighbour is costly and often results in suffering, but hope is that which sustains us in suffering until the end.

In the Postil on Luke 2:1–14, Luther stresses once again that good works are to be done for the good of the neighbour. They are not to be done for God, as God does not need anything from us. He is not to be bribed or conditioned with “the sound of bells, the smoke of candles, the

---

354 Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 145.
355 Martin Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 8, 274.
356 Ibid., 277.
357 Ibid., 280.
358 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 100–1.
glitter of gold and such fancies.” Our works are of no use in earning favour from God. On the other hand, God does command us to serve our neighbour with all our might.\textsuperscript{359} Works are the expression of Christ in us and performed solely for the benefit of the neighbour.\textsuperscript{360} The Christian is to “draw Christ into himself” by faith, appropriating all the treasure of Christ, and is then to share what he has received with his neighbour. Faith and love, says Luther, are the only two things a Christian should be concerned with.

In the first \textit{Postil} on Luke 17:11–19, Luther maintains that good works spring only from faith. All works done without faith are of no value; works springing from faith are the only truly “good” works.\textsuperscript{361} Luther also explains that love naturally teaches the Christian how to do good. Love focuses on the need of the neighbour and wishes to serve the neighbour in whatever way is beneficial to her. This is what makes the works good: “good works” are those works which serve the neighbour.\textsuperscript{362} Luther has a utilitarian definition of “good works”, then, according to which a work is good if it is beneficial to the neighbour. It need not be beautiful, efficient, or spectacular; it need only be useful or beneficial to the neighbour. Conversely, works which are beautiful, efficient, and spectacular are not “good works” at all if not given in service to the neighbour.\textsuperscript{363}

In the first \textit{Postil} for Matthew 21:1–9, Luther insists that the Christian offers \textit{himself} to the neighbour in service. Services are rendered in any and every way needed by the neighbour, yet it is not the works or services \textit{per se} which are offered but the entire self. It is for this reason that Luther is adamant about not naming good works. Just as the work Christ rendered us has no name, our good works cannot be named; Luther refuses to name good works for fear that works

\textsuperscript{359} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 146.
\textsuperscript{360} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{361} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 5, 84.
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{363} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 34–5.
be divided into “good” or “bad” in and of themselves and Christians fall back into the “works righteousness” trap. Works cannot be named because the same work is “good” if done by faith and “bad” if done in unbelief; it is “good” if it serves the neighbour, and not “good” if it is of no benefit to the neighbour.\textsuperscript{364} Good works are an offering of self to the neighbour: Luther exhorts the Christian to give herself completely to the neighbour just as Christ gave himself to us on the cross.\textsuperscript{365} In other words, the person of the Christian is present in the act of the Christian.

In the second Postil on John 14:23–31, Luther points out that a Christian is to love God by keeping his Word.\textsuperscript{366} Now God’s Word commands us to believe in Christ and to love one another as Christ loved us. Christ loves fully as he would have others love him. Therefore, he sacrificed himself as atonement for our sins and delivers us from sin, death, and hell. He is an example of Christian love; we are to love our neighbours as Christ loved us. To be sure, Christ’s self-giving sacrifice is the only effective atonement for our sins. No sacrifice before or after Him has the same efficacy. As Christ took on His cross to redeem humankind, He also appointed us to our own crosses. Though our crosses cannot be compared to His, and we do not affect our own redemption, yet we are appointed to deny ourselves and carry our crosses daily. We are commanded to take up our crosses and follow him.

In the first Postil on John 6:44–51, Luther explains that Christ’s kindness to the believer has “leavened his heart with sweetness and love”, so that he in turn gladly serves his neighbour.\textsuperscript{367} We are to approach service by placing ourselves in the position of our neighbour and asking ourselves how we would like others to serve us if we were they—an act of empathic

\textsuperscript{364} In a parallel fashion Luther affirms, in the first Postil on Titus 2:11–15, that temporal goods are neither good nor bad. No temporal goods are forbidden, only their excess and abuse. Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 124.
\textsuperscript{365} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 34.
\textsuperscript{366} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 289.
\textsuperscript{367} Ibid., 404.
imagination that requires considerable sensitivity—and then rendering that service to the neighbour.\textsuperscript{368}

In the \textit{Postil} on Luke 2:15–20, Luther exhorts the believer to renounce himself in order to love the neighbour. Since good works are good for the neighbour, their aim is not to improve one’s own situation; rather, love involves denying oneself for the benefit of others.\textsuperscript{369} Moreover, Luther maintains, love is given freely without coercion: it “knows no command” and indeed requires no command, but does everything gladly, paying attention to the needy and forgetting the self. Indeed, one does not need to “renounce” the self, because love is not even conscious of the need of the self;\textsuperscript{370} love is utter self-forgetfulness and self-abandonment.

Furthermore, love is expressed in deeds alone. Luther laments that the theologian of glory says many words, but does not follow with any action. Luther maintains that “a Christian should be a man of few words and of many deeds, as he will surely be, if he is a true Christian. If he is not such a man then he is not yet a real Christian.”\textsuperscript{371}

In the first \textit{Postil} on Luke 17:11–19, Luther again expounds faith and love, declaring that we can learn faith and love from the leper and from Christ respectively. The leper receives healing from Christ in faith, and Christ heals him because of love. Luther concludes that “faith and love constitute the whole character of the Christian.”\textsuperscript{372} He similarly points to the people helping the poor man as examples of faith and love: having heard of the goodness of the Lord, these people exercise faith in his goodness and compassion by bringing this poor man before Christ to receive help—an act of love spawned by their faith in Christ.\textsuperscript{373} Likewise the believer,

\textsuperscript{368} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 38–9.
\textsuperscript{369} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., 166.
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 167.
\textsuperscript{372} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 5, 63.
\textsuperscript{373} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 371–2.
having already received everything from God by faith, is content with what she has and needs nothing from the world. She is thus ready and willing to focus on her neighbour’s need and share her possessions, indeed herself, with her neighbour as an expression of love.\(^\text{374}\)

In the first *Postil* on Titus 2:11–15 Luther insists that, although the Christian ought to help the neighbour in love, she must not rely on her own wisdom and strength to do so but must let God be God. She must allow God to work through her and refrain from performing works of her own; she is to look to God and let God direct her life.\(^\text{375}\) In the *Postil* on Luke 2:1–14, Luther explains that both faith and love are Christ’s works, not ours; the former is Christ’s work *without* us (*extra nobis*), and the latter is Christ’s work *within* us (*in nobis*). He describes these two works as the works of the evening and the works of the morning, the completion of one entire day.\(^\text{376}\) The day according to the Scriptures begins in the evening, Luther reminds us; the first half of the day, consisting of evening and night, is dark. So the work of salvation done by Christ is hidden in our faith. The second half of the day is the morning and the day time, and is characterized by light. So it is that Christ’s work of love through us to our neighbours shines brightly forth.

Luther insists that service to the neighbour should be rendered cheerfully. Willing service to the neighbour is also a service to God. If we serve the neighbour unwillingly, not only is the recipient of the service not pleased, but God is not pleased.\(^\text{377}\) In the first *Postil* on Matthew 9:1–8, Luther states that “God does not desire the Christian to live for himself.” Christians ought to live for others, as exemplified by the men who brought the sick man to Jesus.\(^\text{378}\) This is also

---

\(^{374}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 63–4.  
\(^{375}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 127.  
\(^{376}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 152–3.  
\(^{377}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 104.  
\(^{378}\) Ibid., 205.
exemplified by the servant in Matthew 18, who exhibits his faith by serving his neighbour. Luther insists that deeds of love show that we have true faith.\textsuperscript{379}

In the first \textit{Postil} on Romans 15:4–13, Luther exposes the “satanical” pride of the theologians of glory whereby they secretly “despise their neighbours for their imperfections”.\textsuperscript{380} The theologians of glory see only the virtue or vice of the individual and in an imagined superiority judge him accordingly; they do not truly love the person underneath, but love only the virtues. Once all virtues are stripped from the individual, they reject the person outright. The theologian of the cross, however, “discriminates between the vices and the individual”. She does not despise or reject the person but attempts to help him eradicate his sins.\textsuperscript{381} Since “the Christian’s whole purpose in life is to be useful to mankind,” Luther insists that the sinful person is to be accepted in order that we may help him to eradicate his sins. Christian love does not seek godly individuals as its objects; rather, it seeks to make people godly.\textsuperscript{382}

In the first \textit{Postil} on Titus 2:11–15, Luther insists again that being “righteous” means to love our neighbour, doing to him as we would have him do to us. There are no “works” or formulas which can be designated as “the way to righteousness”; rather, the individual has the liberty to act according to her own judgment. This liberty, however, has only one aim: to render assistance to the neighbour even at the risk of “our bodies, our property, our honor and everything that is ours”\textsuperscript{383}. Luther exhorts the Christian not to ask which works to do but to “look to your neighbour”: when one looks to the neighbour, one finds enough to do.

\textsuperscript{379} Ibid., 288.
\textsuperscript{380} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 25–6.
\textsuperscript{381} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{382} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid., 124–5.
Lastly, Luther exhorts the Christian to embrace the cross. The attempt to love the neighbour will meet with “all manner of enmity” because we live in a sinful world, and the world detests true works of love. The world will therefore “render our earthly life difficult and distressing”; this is the cross we are called to bear. The only hope of the suffering Christian is in “being led by grace”. Therefore, the theologian of the cross shuts her eyes to the visible world and opens her eyes of faith to the invisible but eternal. The grace of God transforms our condition from the temporal to the eternal so that we can bear the cross in this world.

Free to Love

Justification is not attained through works; rather, it is the presupposition of all “good works”. The sinner who tries to win salvation through good works is focused only on her own need and therefore adds sin to sin. However, the sinner justified through the free gift of God has a clear conscience coram Deo, and hence no longer needs to concern herself about her own welfare but is able to live her life on earth fully oriented towards her neighbour. Indeed, it is God’s will that after we have been saved by Christ we should serve the needs of our neighbour in love:

In this way the Lord desires to say: You have now received enough from me, peace and joy, and all you should have; for your person you need nothing more. Therefore labor now and follow my example, as I have done, so do ye. My Father sent me into the world only for your sake, that I might serve you, not for my own benefit. I have finished the work, have died for you, and given you all that I am and have; remember and do ye also likewise, that henceforth ye may only serve and help everybody, otherwise ye would have nothing to do on earth. For by faith ye have enough of everything.

---

384 Ibid., 129.
385 Ibid., 131.
386 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2, 359.
In his Postil regarding confession, Luther exhorts believers not merely to go “through the form of confession and never care how they might live better lives in the future.” After we have confessed our sins and received forgiveness from our loving God, we must resolve to live a different life, a life of love.\(^{387}\)

Luther insists that we cannot attain righteousness by keeping human commandments; we must keep God’s commandments in order to be righteous. However, because of our sinful nature, no one can keep all of God’s commandments. Christ is the only human who did so, and therefore is the only righteous human being. It was not for his own sake that Christ came to earth, took human form, and lived a perfect life according to the Law; rather, he was sent by the Father to do so for our sake. Christ declares, in the words of Martin Luther, that “my Father hath sent me to fulfill the law, take the sin of the world upon myself, slay Death and overcome hell and the devil; not for my own sake, for I am not in need of it; but all for your sakes and in your behalf.”\(^{388}\) God the Father, knowing that no human being is capable of fulfilling the Law, sent Christ to fulfil it on our behalf. On the cross the “sweet exchange” took place: Christ took all our sins and gave us his righteousness. He was condemned as the sinner, while we are declared righteous coram Deo. Having been declared righteous before God for Christ’s sake, we are exhorted to do as Christ has done: love our neighbours.\(^{389}\)

In the second Postil on Luke 15:1–10, Luther maintains that Christians are free from the Law. We do not do good works in order to fulfill the Law, because Christ has already fulfilled it on our behalf, and faith allows us to share his righteousness. We are therefore no longer under the Law as a means of attaining righteousness; we do good works now in order to serve our

---

\(^{387}\) Ibid., 235-236.  
\(^{388}\) Ibid., 374.  
\(^{389}\) Ibid., 375.
neighbours. Luther insists that when Christ is appropriated by faith, a new person is created. This person, though no longer under the Law on account of Christ’s righteousness, fulfills the Law gladly out of love for Christ and for the neighbour.

What then is the purpose of the Law? Luther maintains that the Law does not show a person how to accumulate merit and thereby earn salvation; rather, the Law shows Christians what their duties are. In the first Postil on Romans 13:8–10, Luther boldly proclaims that the Law does not exist for itself; its true purpose is the exercise of love.

**Love Is the Natural Result of Justification**

Luther contends that love is a natural outflow of our faith. Faith will make us righteous before God, but “this faith you are to show in love, so that all your works may be directed to this end.” Previously we did good works in the hope of earning merit before God, but now that we realize good works cannot earn merit, and moreover that merit is no longer necessary since we are justified by grace through faith, we may question what purpose is served by good works. The answer is that justified sinners do good works because of their love for their neighbour. In the first Postil on the Ecclesiasticus passage for St. John’s Day, Luther declares again that love flows naturally from faith. The Christian, having appropriated Christ’s righteousness through faith, all his works, and indeed his entire life, is made right. When a person realizes how God has bestowed all upon him by grace, he is willing to do the same for his neighbour as an expression

---

390 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 72.
391 Ibid., 76.
392 Ibid., 77–8.
393 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 63–4.
394 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 320.
of grace—forgiving and bearing with his neighbour, “ministering to him, showing hospitality, denying him nothing, risking body, life, property and honor for his sake”.

In the first *Postil* on Romans 12:1–6, Luther maintains yet again that love is the fruit of faith. Indeed, he affirms that all the fruits of faith are summed up in love. One can perform good works only after becoming a Christian (since good fruit can come forth only from a good tree, Luther insists everywhere); thereafter, a person lives and acts not for herself but in service to the other. In fact, in a statement that seems to come close to endorsing works righteousness, reminiscent of the epistle of James, Luther says, “[I]f you do not give forth such proofs of faith, it is certain that your faith is not right.” He goes on to explain that good works are not commanded of us, for if the “faith in the heart is right, there is no need of much commanding good works to be done; they follow of themselves.”

The *Postil* on Matthew 2:2–10 contains another declaration that the fruit of faith is Christian love in action. Luther laments that many Christians neglect the doing of the Word as admonished in the book of James. In the *Postil* on 1 John 3, he boldly claims (with the Apostle) that the key test or proof for true believers lies in our love for the brethren; this is because only a true believer who has tasted the love of God is willing in turn to bestow love generously upon the neighbour out of gratitude to God. Luther is quick to forestall any suggestion that love or loving action justifies; he is not allowing works righteousness in through

---

395 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 214–6.
396 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 7–8.
397 Ibid., 56.
398 Ibid., 22–5.
399 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 320.
400 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 113.
401 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 52.
the back door. He affirms that faith is needed for us to be justified, but since true faith invariably produces love, there can be no genuine faith where there is no love.\footnote{Ibid., 53.}

Before we appropriate Christ, none of our works can be called “good” because they are never done truly for others but always for self-serving purposes. In the first Postil on John 16:5–15, Luther insists that in order for a work to be good in God’s eyes it must be done willingly from the bottom of one’s heart. This is not possible for fallen human beings except when the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and takes us “out of ourselves”, thereby freeing us from having ourselves be the measure of ourselves and others. The Spirit enables us to be willing and happy to do every good work,\footnote{Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 118.} for when our hearts are changed by the Spirit we are able to love, and love forgets itself and is concerned only with the need of the neighbour.\footnote{Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 128.} The heat and fire of love consumes all evil, says Luther in the first Postil on 1 Peter 4:7–11, for love cannot be quenched; it covers all sins, replaces all evil with good, and is always willing to forgive.\footnote{Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 318–9.}

Meanwhile the theologians of glory speak of love but perform no deeds of love; their love is insincere and shines without fire, giving only an appearance of light, and does not endure. Because they seek only their own interest, their love is fickle. They want to be served; they want to receive without giving in return, and they shy away from all suffering.\footnote{Ibid., 319–20.}

Luther distinguishes carefully between faith and love. Faith has to do with the heart, while love results in works.\footnote{Ibid., 67.} Faith logically precedes love in that it creates the capability in the believer to fulfil the law and to love the neighbour. Strictly speaking, faith does not fulfil the Law directly; it enables love, which fulfils the law. Luther compares faith to an actor and love to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Ibid.}, 53.
\item \textbf{Luther, Sermons}, vol. 3, 118.
\item \textbf{Luther, Sermons}, vol. 5, 128.
\item \textbf{Luther, Sermons}, vol. 7, 318–9.
\item \textbf{Ibid.}, 319–20.
\item \textbf{Ibid.}, 67.
\end{itemize}
the act, insisting that “the law requires the act.” The Law is fulfilled by the act of love, which only the actor, faith, made possible.\(^408\) Faith elevates us to be sons of God, but love demands that we become equal to the poor and the sinner. Luther states famously in *The Freedom of a Christian* that “[a] Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”\(^409\) The same thought is repeated in his *Postils*, where he states that “faith makes of us lords, and love makes of us servants.”\(^410\)

In the *Postil* on Luke 2:1–14, Luther insists again that Christ must become our own before we can do any good works. In other words, good works are a consequence of salvation, not its cause.\(^411\) He notes in the first *Postil* on Luke 16:1–9 that “godliness cannot be attained by anyone without grace in his heart;” in other words, one must first be good in order to do good.\(^412\) Luther rejects the notion that works make a person good. They are at best a witness to the faith (i.e., righteousness) that lies within. Once one has appropriated Christ through faith, Luther exhorts the believer to look away from the self and towards the neighbour. The Scriptures teach that love seeks not its own, that each person should look to the needs of the other rather than to his own needs.\(^413\)

Faith and love are inseparable: “by faith we receive blessings from above, from God; through love we give them out below, to our neighbour.” Luther notes that love of God and love of our neighbour are the same love. God has no need for our works; he asks us only for our faith and recognition of him as God, and wishes that all our works be given to the neighbour. What we do for the neighbour is therefore also done for God. When our neighbour is converted and

\(^{408}\) Ibid., 68.


\(^{410}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 73.

\(^{411}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 144.

\(^{412}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 296.

\(^{413}\) Ibid., 372.
brought into fellowship with God, we have rendered praise and worship to God. Also, God views worldly wisdom as foolishness. He desires to be loved “amid crosses and afflictions”. We are to find God among the weak and lowly, the wretched and needy, directing all our works to the needy neighbour and in this way expressing our love for God.\(^414\) We are not reservoirs of God’s blessings, insists Luther, but conduits: rather than retain God’s blessings for ourselves, we are to allow them to flow through us to our neighbours.\(^415\)

Luther insists, in the *Postil* for Matthew 21:1–9, that good works naturally follow from our faith in Christ. Where there are no good works, “faith is surely not present; for where faith is, there the Holy Ghost is and must work love and good works.”\(^416\) The theologians of glory, on the other hand, reverse the purpose of both faith and love, contends Luther in the *Postil* on Matthew 2:2–10. First, by performing works in expectation of meriting salvation before God, they choose “a different way than through Christ”. Second, their works are performed for selfish purposes rather than for the good of the neighbour. Thus they refuse to acknowledge Christ and neglect the neighbour.\(^417\)

Luther regards the rich man in the parable of Lazarus as a type of all unbelievers and therefore a type of those he calls the “theologians of glory”.\(^418\) The sin of the rich man, Luther contends, is not his riches but his indulgence and trust in his riches: in pursuing riches and feeling secure in them he does not trust God, nor does he serve his neighbour Lazarus. The theologian of the cross lives contrary to this rich man, for “where faith is, there is no anxiety for fine clothing and sumptuous feasting”; there is only longing for God himself. The theologian of

---

\(^{414}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 69.  
\(^{415}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 74.  
\(^{416}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 21–2.  
\(^{417}\) Ibid., 112.  
\(^{418}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 21.
the cross cleaves to God alone and sees this as her highest good. She is able and willing, therefore, to part with all her possessions in the service of others. The theologian of glory, on the other hand, refuses to cleave to God and insists on cleaving to vain possessions just like the rich man in the parable. He is “absorbed by these vanities” in his unbelief, too self-absorbed to notice a suffering neighbour like Lazarus. Luther insists that “whoever feels the goodness of God, feels also for the misfortune of his neighbour; but whoever is not conscious of the goodness of God, sympathizes not in the misfortune of his neighbour.” The theologian of glory, busy accumulating material goods, hopes to receive gain from others and therefore has eyes only for the rich, influential, powerful, and honoured. But the theologians of the cross are content and satisfied with everything God gives them through grace, and are therefore naturally pleased to do good works for the neighbour. It is in the nature of faith, says Luther that it “expects all good from God and relies only on God.” Since she has all she needs, the Christian gladly gives what she has to those in need. Her eyes are always looking for the needy, “the sick, the weak, the poor, the despised and the sinful people,” among whom she can exercise love and compassion just as God has done to her.

Lazarus is this neighbour in need of our services. Luther deduces that Lazarus is among the faithful because he is favoured in God’s eyes; “poverty and suffering make no one acceptable to God.” If it is not because he is poor and suffering that Lazarus is favoured by God, it must be because of his faith. Though the poor are no closer to salvation than the rich, Luther notes that

419 Ibid., 19.
420 Ibid., 20.
421 Ibid., 21.
422 Luther, Sermons, vol. 1, 158.
423 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 21.
424 Ibid., 22.
they are the greatest treasures God lays before us, giving us the opportunity to serve them.⁴²⁵

God wishes Christians to put the needs of the neighbour first, and serve the neighbour even before service to himself.⁴²⁶ Therefore, when we meet someone like Lazarus, it is our duty to serve the needs of Lazarus.

In the second *Postil* on Luke 10:23–37, the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luther notes that the theologian of the cross does not serve others in the expectation of reward or honour; she serves freely and gladly, just like the Samaritan in this parable. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the theologian of glory never thinks of the need of the neighbour but is like the priest and Levite who pass the injured person by. He does not think that he owes the neighbour anything, yet he wants to be considered among the saints and the godly.⁴²⁷ Moreover, the theologian of glory imagines the neighbour according to his own fancy, regarding as his neighbour only the people he likes. He does not consider the stranger, the unworthy, the poor, and the persecuted to be his neighbour.⁴²⁸ But Christ did not answer the question, “Who is my neighbour?” Instead, he exhorted the hearer to become a neighbour to the needy. This parable shows that Christ himself came to be our neighbour, saving the sinner from certain ruin. Christ is our great neighbour.⁴²⁹ Luther maintains that as one tastes the goodness of Christ through faith the Holy Spirit moves the heart to love God and the neighbour.⁴³⁰ The work of love flows after the heart believes, out of the love we have received from Christ.⁴³¹ Good works done with a

---

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 24–5.
⁴²⁶ Ibid., 173.
⁴²⁷ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 48.
⁴²⁸ Ibid., 51.
⁴²⁹ Ibid., 52.
⁴³⁰ Ibid., 54.
⁴³¹ Ibid., 138.
“troubled conscience and a heavy heart” are sin; works must be done willingly and joyfully, and therefore only as the natural fruit of faith.

In the Postil on Luke 16:19–31, Luther declares that faith and love cannot be separated: it is impossible to love where no faith exists, and impossible to believe where there is no love. As indicated previously, we are justified by faith and only a justified person is free to love. But a justified person is also freed in order to love; i.e., love is the proper fruit of justification and ergo of faith. Luther is not suggesting that love is a condition of faith but rather that it is impossible for a person of faith not to bear the fruit of love. This duality of faith and love can also be seen in the Lord’s Supper. Luther insists that it is “our duty to let the benefit and fruit of the Lord’s Supper become manifest, and we ought to show that we have received it with profit.” He complains that while we claim to receive God’s grace through participation in the Lord’s Supper, there is no evident fruit coming from it. The fruit that ought to be manifest, says Luther, is the offering of ourselves in service to our neighbour—just as Christ, in the Lord’s Supper, offers himself in order to serve us. Just as Christ offers his body and blood for us to eat and drink, we ought to offer ourselves to be “eaten and drunk” by our neighbour. What does it mean to offer oneself to be “eaten and drunk”? Luther explains that “when I become a public servant and serve you so that you enjoy my service whenever you need me, then I am thus your food.” Christ offers everything he has to us—his righteousness, life, and salvation. In the same way, we ought to offer our neighbour the entirety of what we have received from God, and say, “Behold, my dear brother, I have received my Lord; he is mine, and I have more than enough and great

---

432 Ibid., 33.
433 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 21.
434 Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 208.
435 Ibid.
436 Ibid., 234.
abundance. Now you take what I have, it shall be yours, and I place it at your disposal. Is it necessary for me to die for you, I will even do that.”

When a Christian truly understands the meaning of the Lord’s Supper and partakes of it rightly, she will surely allow God’s grace to flow through her toward her neighbour and offer herself in her neighbour’s service; for this reason it is only when the Christian truly offers herself to the neighbour that she can be sure she has partaken of the Lord’s Supper with profit. Luther observes,

[I]f you discover that the words and the symbol soften and move you to be friendly to your enemy, to take an interest in your neighbour’s welfare, and to help him bear his suffering and affliction, then it is well. On the other hand, if you do not find it so, you continue uncertain even if you were to commune a hundred times a day with devotions so great as to move you to tears for very joy; for wonderful devotions like this, very sweet to experience, yet as dangerous as sweet, amount to nothing before God.”

Luther distinguishes between the love that comes from God and worldly love. The world seeks only its own advantage and loves only when a gain is to be made, whereas God’s love is unconditional; he loves without expectation of return or gain. God’s love is to be the pattern for ours. We “must be occupied with no other thought than how we can serve others,” says Luther. We should be willing to give our material possessions—indeed, even ourselves—for friends and enemies alike. God’s love is also to be distinguished from worldly sentimentality. That is, serving the neighbour does not mean that we do whatever he wants; rather, serving the neighbour means helping him to become better, doing what is truly good for him. In the first Postil on 1 Peter 4:7–11, Luther teaches that true love is angry when a neighbour sins, and will

---

437 Ibid., 208.
438 Ibid., 209.
439 Ibid.
440 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 151.
441 Ibid.
442 Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 39.
even rebuke the sinner—not out of a wish to disgrace the sinner, but out of a desire for the sinner’s improvement. Love is angered by the neighbour’s sin because it seeks the neighbour’s good, yet it accepts and forgives the sinner while making every effort to help the sinner improve.\textsuperscript{443}

The Theologian of the Cross Trusts God for Earthly Needs

The first \textit{Postil} on Mark 8:1–9 contains an exhortation to the theologians of the cross to trust God by faith in temporal matters. Here Luther uses the picture of a child to describe us: like children, we are weak, and must look to God for supplication. This teaches us to rely on God at all times. Trusting in God in temporal matters also leads us to depend on him for spiritual blessings.\textsuperscript{444} The theologian of the cross hopes for all things in faith; though he cannot see the temporal goods he needs, he trusts in God for their timely provision. The theologian of glory, on the other hand, clings to reason and depends on his own wisdom to identify and supply his own needs. Luther insists that “reason and faith in no way agree.” The more we rely on reason, and indeed the wiser reason appears to be, the less it accomplishes the works of God. Luther exhorts Christians to “blindfold reason,\textsuperscript{445} when we begin to believe, and then give reason a permanent furlough.”\textsuperscript{446}

Waiting for God to supply our needs is a long and patient wait. The theologians of glory shun faith because they want to be certain of the outcomes of temporal matters. They do not want to take any risk, and therefore cannot put their faith entirely in God.\textsuperscript{447} In the \textit{Postil} on the parable of the seed (Matthew 22:1–14), Luther understands the first three kinds of soil as

\textsuperscript{443}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 320.
\textsuperscript{444}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 204.
\textsuperscript{445}As indicated above, Luther maintains that while the structure of reason survives the Fall, the integrity of reason does not. As a result, sin-devastated reasoning now serves sin and self-interest; it is rationalization.
\textsuperscript{446}Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{447}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 2, 121.
representing theologians of glory who turn away from faith. The first kind is those who shun suffering, shame, and dishonour; they do not “believe that God can protect us from shame and preserve us in honor.” The second kind is those who worry about their temporal needs because they do not trust God to sustain them and supply their needs in a timely manner. The third kind is those who consider themselves wise and exalted, persecuting honest Christians in order to preserve their own honour and praise. Luther exhorts the Christian to trust that Christ concerns himself more for our needs than we ourselves do, as illustrated by the feeding of the four thousand in this passage. The theologian of the cross trusts God’s sufficient grace, and is thankful and content with whatever God gives her. Though she has only two dollars and can barely feed her family, she is more blessed than the theologian of glory who has twenty thousand dollars. The theologian of glory is always hoarding because he never thinks he has enough, while the theologian of the cross values each dollar God gives.

The Theologian of the Cross Is Willing to Give Generously

The theologian of the cross is not only content with what she receives from God, but (as a result) is willing to give generously to others. She views herself as a steward of God’s gifts: what God gives she shares with others in need, exemplifying both faith and love. The opposite is true of the theologian of glory. He not only does not give to others, he takes away from the needy in order to satisfy his insatiable greed. In the second Postil on Matthew 7:15–23, Luther points out that while the theologian of the cross exercises love towards the needy and even the

448 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 229.
449 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 224.
450 Ibid., 230.
451 Ibid., 230–1.
enemy,452 the hearts of the theologians of glory are hardened against the neighbour: they “enjoy their neighbour’s fall and use it to set off their own goodness.”453 The theologians of glory, says Luther in the first Postil on Matthew 22:15–22, use their gifts for self-serving ends and ignore the needs of the neighbour.454 They are always honoured in the world, because the sole concern of the theologians of glory is for “fame, power, position and wealth, for authority over all men.”455 For this reason they always separate themselves from other Christians, believing themselves to be in a higher “spiritual” class.456 They hold high positions and are praised by the world, while the theologians of the cross are despised by the world. Yet their status before God is the opposite: theologians of glory who cling to their own wisdom hold no place before God, but the lowly theologians of the cross are favoured in God’s eyes.457

In the Postil on 2 Corinthians 12:1–9 Luther once again describes the characteristics of the theologians of glory:

1. As false teachers, they wait until a solid foundation is laid by the true teachers and then take the credit.
2. They force laws upon the people, putting them under bondage.
3. They abuse their disciples and cheat them of their possessions.
4. They always take more than what is given them.
5. They exalt themselves above others and want to be lords over others.
6. They consider everyone to be beneath them and abuse them accordingly.458

Theologians of glory seek “a life of ease and honour” and rejoice in being superior to others; they seek after riches and glory and are therefore highly esteemed by the world. Since their motive is to gain honour for themselves, they preach to please the world instead of

452 Ibid., 259.
453 Ibid., 260.
454 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 300.
455 Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 74.
456 Ibid., 89.
457 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 301.
preaching the pure Gospel. The theologian of the cross, on the other hand, does not rejoice in temporal things but only in the Lord; neither gold, silver, eating, drinking, nor physical pleasures induce joy in her. Luther calls these “deceptive joys, false joys” which never affect the depths of our hearts.\(^{459}\) Instead the theologian of the cross glories in the cross and in suffering, things the world shuns.\(^{460}\)

In the first *Postil* on Colossians 3:1–7, Luther maintains that the evil intentions of the theologians of glory are hidden to the world: though they worship Mammon in their covetousness, this is not immediately recognizable because they often clothe their greed and covetousness in the Word of God. They insist that they are only trying to maintain their livelihood; they acquire property and wealth honestly, and are ethically above reproach.\(^{461}\) Similarly, Christ’s resurrection and the life of a true Christian are hidden from the world: Christ’s resurrection cannot be proved but can only be apprehended by faith, and true Christians are not recognized or admired by the world—it treats them like doormats. Yet God chose this small group of “timid, poor, despised people” to be his dwelling over the grandeur of the temple and the holy city of Jerusalem.\(^{462}\) The Christian’s life is “a hidden life”, not considered praiseworthy by the world; but the Christian must close her eyes to the world, shut her ears against the world’s criticisms, and believe with her heart that a life in Christ is indeed glorious.\(^{463}\) All hiddenness will finally be revealed at the *eschaton*. In the meantime, Luther consoles the Christian in affliction, encouraging her to put her faith in Christ, endures the present sufferings, and dies to the world so that at the *eschaton* she shall live with Christ in everlasting glory.\(^{464}\)

\(^{459}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 95.
\(^{460}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 106–7.
\(^{461}\) Ibid., 225.
\(^{462}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 318.
\(^{463}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 228.
\(^{464}\) Ibid., 228–9.
Good Works are for the neighbour

In the second Postil on Matthew 7:15–23, Luther teaches that the function of works is to serve the neighbour. Works do not justify us before God; only faith in Christ justifies.\textsuperscript{465} According to the first Postil on Luke 16:1–9, mammon means that “a man has more than he needs for his support, so that he can help others without injuring himself.” Luther criticizes those who teach that one is not obligated to help others except in cases of greatest need; he maintains that everything we have that exceeds our basic needs is to be used to help our neighbours. Holding back these goods from the neighbour amounts to theft from God, and we therefore possess them unrighteously.\textsuperscript{466}

Christ is our Example

In the second Postil on John 10:11–16, Luther makes clear that Christ is not only our Saviour but also our example. Justification by faith is always Luther’s “downbeat”; he insists that Christ’s greatest and most important work is his death and resurrection, and would never teach that Christ is an example without also teaching about the atonement he has wrought on our behalf. Without justification, after all, sinners are unable to follow Christ’s example; in fact, without faith all deeds are evil in God’s eyes. At the same time, Luther does not emphasize Christ’s atonement one-sidedly. He maintains that after we have appropriated Christ and the treasure of salvation, we must follow him by loving our neighbours as he loved us.\textsuperscript{467} In the first Postil on John 3:16–21, Luther again affirms that Christians ought to follow the example of

\textsuperscript{465} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 262.
\textsuperscript{466} Ibid., 293.
\textsuperscript{467} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 40.
Christ and love our neighbours.\(^{468}\) We must love as he loved, giving himself as a sacrifice for the benefit of others.\(^{469}\) In the first *Postil* on Romans 13:11–14, Luther admonishes the believers to put on Christ in two ways: first, we “clothe ourselves with his virtues”, that is, we appropriate Christ and his righteousness through faith and become justified before God; and second, we should put on “the virtuous garment of his walk”. In other words, we are to imitate his example of love and virtue.\(^{470}\)

Christ’s example of love is noted in the first *Postil* on Luke 17:11–19: he does good without harming others.\(^{471}\) Luther adds that Christ’s love goes above and beyond the call of duty, always seeking to do good and never considering its work to be finished. Moreover, Christ loves despite the ingratitude shown him by those he loves: of the ten lepers Jesus cleansed, Luther reminds us, only one came back to thank him. Yet Christ is unwavering in his love for the world.\(^{472}\)

Christ did not come to rule with might; he rules by mercy, and uses his power and might only to serve the weak. This was in evidence as he ministered to his “weak band” of disciples after his resurrection.\(^{473}\) Similarly, we are not to be condescending toward those who are weak, or boast or take pleasure in our apparent strength; rather, we are to serve them with our gifts and powers - “weakband” that we are - as the Lord served us.

The Christian church consists, after all, of those who will be weak until the *eschaton*: it consists of a group of imperfect human beings who, though declared righteous before God, are still frail and prone to sin. Luther draws congregants’ attention to this fact through the *Postil* on

\(^{468}\) Ibid., 349.
\(^{469}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 151.
\(^{470}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 22.
\(^{471}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 74.
\(^{472}\) Ibid., 75.
\(^{473}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 246.
the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. They, like the other disciples, did not believe that Christ was resurrected until “Christ himself drew them out by means of many and various sermons and revelations.” Luther boldly proposes that “during the three days after Christ’s crucifixion, faith in his resurrection had completely died in all hearts.” Yet Christ did not rebuke them; rather, “he bears and overlooks these shortcomings.” Christ is loving and merciful toward the weak in faith. We ought likewise to bear with those who are weak in faith; this forbearance is an expression of our love.

We are to serve our neighbour in every possible way out of love. Whatever we give we are to give freely, without expectation of return. Luther considers a life of service to the neighbour to be a great blessing: “Blessed be the life, in which one lives not for himself but for his neighbour and serves him by teaching, by rebuke, by help and by whatever manner and means. If my neighbour errrs, I am to correct him; if he cannot immediately follow me, then I am to bear patiently with him; so we are to give heed to do everything in behalf of our neighbour.”

The greatest service we can render to our neighbour, according to Luther, is the proclamation of the Gospel, delivering the message of forgiveness of sins and liberation from the evil one. He maintains that “the first and highest work of love a Christian ought to do…is to bring others also to believe.” The office of the external Word is entrusted not only to pastors but to every Christian; pastors preach the Word during worship services, but “every Christian should instruct and teach his neighbour, that he may also come to Christ.”

---

474 Ibid.
475 Ibid.
476 Ibid., 322.
477 Ibid., 306.
478 Ibid., 307.
attested in Luther’s *Postil* regarding confession. While Luther considers the public office of preaching exclusive to those elected to it, he exhorts ordinary Christians, when approached by a fellow believer, to speak the word of absolution—to “tell him to appropriate the words of Christ and to believe firmly that Christ’s righteousness is his own and his sins are Christ’s”.\(^{479}\) This is consistent with what Luther teaches in his tract *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* regarding private confession. First Luther affirms the practice of private confession. Next he insists that like the Mass and Baptism, confession and absolution is effective based on Christ’s promises and is appropriated by faith. Thirdly, Luther maintains that whenever two brothers or sisters come together, one to confess and the other to hear, and to pronounce absolution in Christ’s name, Christ himself is present. He cites Matt 18:20 where Christ promises that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” as proof. Lastly, Luther insists that “I have no doubt that everyone is absolved from his secret sins when he has made confession, privately before any brother,” because Christ has given all believers the power to absolve sins openly.\(^{480}\)

When we serve our neighbour, we should do so for the benefit of the neighbour only, not as a way to curry favour with God. Luther instructs that “whoever is a ruler, a prince, a mayor, a judge, let him not think that he is a ruler to gain heaven thereby or to seek his own advantage; but to serve the public. And so with other works, I assume to do for the good of my neighbour.”\(^{481}\)

Christians do good work as an emulation of Christ, who is the supreme example of neighbourly love. Since Christ worked solely for our benefit, we ought to direct our works to our

\(^{479}\) Ibid., 322.


\(^{481}\) Ibid.
neighbour just as Christ directed his works to us. Luther maintains that Christ did everything for our benefit and expects us to return the service in kind. But since Christ has everything and does not need anything from us, he directs us to our neighbour.

In his *Postil* on the miracle of changing water into wine, Luther points to Christ’s love for the groom, bride, and guests, shown first by granting them the occasion of his personal presence and then by providing wine in their time of need. The love of Christ extends beyond the spiritual to the temporal. He is willing to be our ever-ready helper “so that all who believe in him shall not suffer want”.

In the *Postil* regarding the healing of the centurion’s servant, Luther once again points to Christ’s love for us. Just as the servant was dear to the centurion, we are all dear to our Lord, and just as the centurion showed compassion for his servant and sought healing for him, the Lord also has compassion for all of us and is ever willing to provide for our needs. Luther goes on to exhort listeners to learn from Christ, not to be “satisfied in that we now have the Gospel”, but to have more regard for the need of the neighbour.

Similarly, in his *Postil* on the calming of the storm, Luther extols the love of Christ who, even though his sleep is interrupted by the disciples, is still willing to help them in their time of need. Even though the disciples are men of little faith and deserve his rebuke more than his help, Christ takes mercy on them and “ministers to them out of free love without any merit on their part”. In yet another *Postil*, on the healing of the leper, Luther observes that Christ became a

---

482 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 145.
483 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 44.
484 Ibid.
485 Ibid., 57.
486 Ibid.
487 Ibid., 76.
servant out of love. “[L]ove makes a servant of Christ,” declares Luther, “so that he helps the poor man freely without any reward, and seeks neither advantage, favor nor honor thereby, but only the good of the poor man and the honor of God the Father.”

Luther further notes that love goes farther than all commands and temporal law; no one can complain of obligations unfulfilled by one who takes on the obligation to love, for “it is love’s way to give all.” Through love one gives oneself in every respect to others and is therefore no longer under obligation to any.

In the first Postil on Romans 12:1–6 Luther maintains that “the suffering and work of Christ” is both a grace bestowed on us and an example for us to follow. He exhorts us Christians to offer up our bodies as living sacrifices, explaining that when we offer ourselves to God we become one with Christ, so that our imperfect sacrifices become acceptable to God. Since the offering of our body is done through the Spirit, it is a spiritual sacrifice.

Luther exhorts the Christian to learn from Christ’s example, helping others just as Christ helped the sick, the poor, and the unwanted. In the first Postil on Titus 3:4–8, Luther exhorts us to love our neighbours even if they are unworthy, because God has acted graciously towards us who are also unworthy. We should bear with our “blind, erring and wicked” neighbours; we should be lenient in judgment and cheerful in helping them. God is impartial, Luther reminds us, and makes no distinctions between persons. He does not favour one and despise another.

Divine love cares not for human works or merits; it is pure grace.

---

488 Ibid., 56.
489 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 58.
490 Ibid., 59.
491 Ibid., 9.
492 Ibid.
493 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 69.
494 Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 142–3.
495 Ibid., 144–5.
True Christians should always be willing to share the sufferings of their brethren in faith.\textsuperscript{496} Since we are the body of Christ, what happens to one happens to all; unity, says Luther, “entails the participation by each individual in the good and evil of every other one.”\textsuperscript{497} He exhorts believers to bear with each other—especially those who are weak in faith, whom we are to treat with “gentleness, kindness and patience.” We must understand that each has his own weaknesses with which others must bear; since we would like others to bear with our weaknesses, we should in turn be willing to bear with the weakness of others.\textsuperscript{498}

Luther insists that the Christian ought to love the poor and the weak neighbour just as Christ has done. In the Postil on Matthew 2 Luther maintains that Christ is the consolation for the lowly, associating only with “the blind, the deaf, the lame, the lepers, the dead and the poor”.\textsuperscript{499} The Postil for Christmas Day goes so far as to declare that Christ is “clothed” in the poor and lowly: whenever we serve the poor and the lowly, we serve Christ. Luther implores the believer to look beyond appearances to the final glorious state of the believing neighbour: “if your neighbour were now what he shall be in the future, and lay before you, you would surely give him attention.”\textsuperscript{500}

Christ assumes our poverty and misery so that he might deliver us from it,\textsuperscript{501} says Luther. He points out that Christ was born into poverty, and his poverty “teaches how we should find him in our neighbours, the lowliest and the most needy”.\textsuperscript{502} In the third Postil on John 14 Luther claims that it is the poor, dejected, and timid who are called into the kingdom. They are the ones

\textsuperscript{496} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 124.
\textsuperscript{497} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{498} Ibid., 125–6.
\textsuperscript{499} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 109.
\textsuperscript{500} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{501} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 5, 346.
\textsuperscript{502} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 169.
who become “the true house of God and the true Church”. God is found in the “humble cots of such as are poor and despised, who fear and believe the Word of Christ and would gladly be Christians, but who feel themselves to be very unholy and unworthy sinners”.

Christians are to “loan, give and part with our possessions, or we will be deficient in our faith”.

The Greatest Love Is to Bear the Neighbour’s Weakness and Sin

Luther proposes that the greatest love is to bear the neighbour’s weakness, his sin and even his shame. In his tract “Two Kinds of Righteousness”, Luther insists that each person should empty “himself of God’s gifts, he should conduct himself as if his neighbor’s weakness, sin, and foolishness were his very own.” We ought to follow the example of Christ, who emptied himself and willingly took on human form, became one of us and he is “living as if all the evils which were ours were actually his own.” These teachings are also expounded in the Postils.

The first Postil on Colossians 3 contrasts the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross. The theologians of glory demand perfection from all, and when perfection is not reached they condemn, rebuke, and reproach without showing mercy. The theologian of the cross, on the other hand, understands that all Christians (including herself) are simultaneously both justified and sinful, and is willing to associate with these imperfect saints. “Christians reject none, but bear with all” is Luther’s motto.

503 Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 315.
504 Ibid., 316.
505 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 105.
507 Ibid.
508 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 78.
In order to love someone we must make sacrifices. We may sacrifice money or goods in order to aid our neighbour; we may spend time and energy to help him. We can “visit and comfort him when he is sick and in sorrow, feed him when hungry, loose him when bound…” Yet the greatest and most difficult, according to Luther, is to bear the neighbour’s weakness and sin.\footnote{Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 176–7.} It is always easier to stand apart and offer help to those in need, but to stand \textit{with or among} sinners, to become one of them, to identify with them as condemned in the eyes of the world, is much more difficult. Yet that is what we are called to do. Luther points to the example of Christ, who gave up his honoured position in heaven and took our sins on the cross, dying as a sinner among sinners. He was made a sinner in our stead; on the cross, he was reckoned with the sinners. In the cross the world sees only shame, weakness, condemnation, sin, and death; the majesty of Christ is nowhere apparent. To be a believer, to be a follower of Christ, means that we must likewise be willing to be reckoned with sinners, to bear “the other’s sins and infirmities”.\footnote{Ibid., 198.} Suffering on our neighbour’s behalf is central to the \textit{theologia crucis}.

We should endure our neighbour’s weaknesses just as Christ endures ours. Luther cites Christ’s patience and love in bearing with disciples who “stray and stumble, making his wisdom yield and serve their folly”.\footnote{Ibid., 176.} Christ does not condemn them, nor does he condemn us; rather, he “abandons his righteousness, judgment, power, vengeance, and punishment, and his authority over us and our sins” because of his love, and chooses to comfort instead of rebuke. It is no small evidence of love, says Luther, to bear with our neighbour’s weaknesses. In the third \textit{Postil} on Mark 16 he extols the example of Christ, who is patient and kind to those who are obstinate in their unbelief. Instead of rejecting or despising Thomas, Christ shows great forbearance toward
him, knowing that Thomas will be a better witness after this because he will learn from his own experience to bear with others who are similarly stubborn. The believer is exhorted to follow Christ’s example in bearing with those whose consciences are weakened; we should not denounce or ignore them but should instead help to heal their “spiritual disorder” and eradicate their wrong beliefs. We are to be patient and kind to them, allowing them time to learn and to change until they are “made whole”.

We are also to help those who are “weak and sickly” in regard to good works. According to Luther there are two types of “invalid” Christians: those who are inwardly defective with respect to faith, and those who are outwardly defective with respect to works. He maintains that Christ desires none of them to be rejected. It is difficult to bear with the imperfect neighbour, acknowledges Luther, going so far as to say that sometimes the suffering Christian may even wish to be put to death. In these dire circumstances the Christian is encouraged to read the Word of God, for God’s Word will provide comfort and patience and help the Christian to be steadfast in the midst of suffering. Luther insists that we must bear with our neighbours, adapting ourselves to them even at the cost of our own honour and life.

In the first Postil on Romans 15 Luther again points to Christ’s example in bearing with sins: as he bore our sins, we should bear with the sins of our neighbours. Christ did not condemn sinners but gave himself to be their servant, exchanging his righteousness for their sins, his strength for their weaknesses, his life for their death. In the first Postil on Luke 6 Luther

---

512 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 211.
513 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 31.
514 Ibid., 33.
515 Ibid., 34.
516 Ibid., 44.
517 Ibid., 97.
518 Ibid., 55.
519 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 63.
maintains that “Christian mercy should not seek its own” but look to the needs of those around us, whether friend or foe. It looks particularly to the sinful and unworthy, because if the person merits our help it is no longer mercy to help her but a duty and debt. Luther insists that there is no greater sin than to use God’s gifts for self-serving purposes while despising the sinful neighbour who stands in need of our help. He therefore exhorts the believer to go among “fools and simpletons” and help them turn from their sinful ways and find righteousness. In the first Postil on Luke 15, Luther insists that the greatest service we can render a neighbour is to surrender our own righteousness and “make it serve for the sins of my neighbour”. This is in stark contrast to the theologians of glory, who despise the sinner; they admire their own life of honour and wish to stay as far away from the sinner as possible, failing to understand that a Christian is a servant and that her virtues are tools to serve the good of the neighbour. Luther maintains that Christian saints are to “stoop down and take the sinners upon their shoulders”—that is, by means of their own righteousness and piety to help these sinners rise out of their sins. We should go down into the pit with the sinner, take up his sin, and climb out of the pit with him. In fact, says Luther, we are to act as if our neighbour’s sin were our own.

The Christian is exhorted not only to bear with the neighbour’s sins but also to receive him in fellowship and to heal and restore him from his infirmities. Mercy is to be shown even to the Pope and the bishops. Luther exhorts believers to yield to the Pope as long as he does not force the believer to go against her conscience. Indeed, Luther maintains that we should honour

520 Ibid., 100–1.
521 Ibid., 64.
522 Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 27.
523 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 59–60.
524 Ibid., 61.
525 Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 36.
the Pope’s desire and commands. The theologian of the cross should be willing to relent in temporal matters; he is unyielding when the Word and faith are at stake, but should not be contentious if only his honour or worldly things are involved. Though the Pope and bishops are perceived by Luther to be the enemies of the Gospel, he wishes that not “a hair of their heads should be injured, or that they should be robbed of a cent”; his wish is rather that they come to know the error of their ways, return to the grace of God, and believe the Gospel.

In the second Postil on Luke 6, Luther uses Monica as an example of the fruits of bearing with the unworthy. Monica treated her unbelieving husband with love and patience, exercising all her virtues in order to serve him. When he was angry, she prayed for him and returned kind words. In this way her husband was converted and became a Christian. Luther invokes Monica as a model for all Christians: we should be merciful with our unbelieving spouses, friends, and neighbours in order that through our love they are brought before Christ. Love is long-suffering, Luther reminds us; it is willing to suffer with patience, bearing with the wicked and infirm.

At the same time, Luther makes a clear distinction between the Christian as a private individual and the Christian as officeholder. While the individual should exercise mercy toward the sinner, the office is sometimes called upon to judge and punish the sin. The Christian officer, then, should exact judgment and punishment according to the requirement of his office. Luther believes that since the function of the office is granted by God, the faithful execution of

---

526 Ibid., 98–9.
527 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 51.
528 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 117.
529 Ibid., 114–15.
530 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 125.
531 For a fuller exposition of Luther’s teaching of the Two Kingdoms and Two Governments see below.
the office is in fact a work of mercy for the people as a whole, even as it deals out punishment to
the individual.\footnote{\textsuperscript{532} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 119.}

Luther insists that the Christian should yield her personal right if doing so meets the need
of the neighbour. He reasons that yielding one’s own rights does not offend our faith but is
profitable to the neighbour; therefore, it is our duty to lay down our rights just as our Lord did for
the sake of the neighbour.\footnote{\textsuperscript{533} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 100–1.} Those who insist on claiming justice and rights always cause war
and calamity, whereas “forbearance is essentially good, inherently kind.” Moreover, Christian
forbearance should be impartial: we should bear with both friend and foe and in this way make
our love complete.\footnote{\textsuperscript{534} Ibid., 103.}

Once again, however, we must be prepared for the natural outcome of forbearance, which
is suffering and the cross. What can the Christian do when visited by the cross? Luther
denounces the use of power against one’s enemy. The temptation is to use greater force to meet
the force of one’s enemy, but this would be to return evil for evil; in the attempt to overcome the
evil of one’s enemy, one only becomes a greater evil.\footnote{\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., 55.} The Christian is not to cause strife by
returning evil for evil; instead, we should be willing to endure persecution and suffering.\footnote{\textsuperscript{536} Ibid., 52.} Luther admonishes believers to forgo vengeance, insisting that “our enjoyment of peace depends
on our quiet endurance of others’ disturbance.” We ought rather to leave our injustices to God,
who has promised us a righteous judgment and retribution.\footnote{\textsuperscript{537} Ibid., 53.} Luther also invites Christians to
pray, for prayer allows us to rejoice in God and be content with the peace he bestows, a peace
that is not dependent upon the removal of evil. This peace, which Luther calls the “peace of the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\footnotesize
\item \textsuperscript{532} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 119.
\item \textsuperscript{533} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 100–1.
\item \textsuperscript{534} Ibid., 103.
\item \textsuperscript{535} Ibid., 55.
\item \textsuperscript{536} Ibid., 52.
\item \textsuperscript{537} Ibid., 53.
\end{thebibliography}
cross”, gives Christians strength to endure suffering.\textsuperscript{538} It is the work of God, which reason\textsuperscript{539} cannot comprehend; no one can understand this peace before experiencing it.\textsuperscript{540} And finally, the Christian bears suffering cheerfully in the hope of the \textit{eschaton}: we await the “great and glorious redemption” when Christ comes again.\textsuperscript{541}

Bearing with one another in love is naturally mutual; it is not the case that some Christians are always the strong ones bearing with the weaker ones. Rather, we must all bear with each other, as we are all imperfect. Perfection is beyond this life. We are always “on our way” towards the perfection shown us by Christ. Luther describes this life beautifully as “a constant progress from faith to faith, from love to love, from patience to patience, and from affliction to affliction. It is not righteousness, but justification; not purity, but purification; we have not yet arrived at our destination, but we are all on the road, and some are farther advanced than others.”\textsuperscript{542} Therefore, we must bear with each other in love just as Christ has borne with us.

To summarize, the cross of Christ reveals the essence of Christian ethics: love. Christ came and died to save the sinner because of love. Therefore, love is the motivation for all works performed by the Christian and these works should be performed toward the neighbour.

Prior to our justification, we are sinners who are unable to love our neighbour. All of our best works remain sins. However, as we appropriate Christ through faith, faith enables us to love. Indeed, love is the outward expression of faith. It cannot be separated from faith. We live in Christ by faith and live in our neighbour by love. Since God has promised and given us everything we need, we no longer need to work for our ends. All of our work should be directed

\textsuperscript{538} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 110.
\textsuperscript{539} Again, reason understands the cross only as reason’s integrity is restored by grace.
\textsuperscript{540} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{541} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 132.
\textsuperscript{542} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 2, 178.
toward the neighbour. Christ is the great example of this love. His incarnation, his earthly works
and his death on the cross are all examples of love toward others. Therefore, we should do
likewise and are enabled by him to do so.
Chapter 5
Cross-Bearing: The Cost of Discipleship

The theology of the cross focuses on the cross of Jesus Christ and the ethics of the cross (chapter four), but it also compels believers to bear their own cross to follow Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ reveals and commits us to our own cross. Just as Christ bore his cross out of love for us, we Christians who follow him are called to deny ourselves and take up our cross to serve our neighbours. Cross-bearing is the form of true discipleship.

Christians love the neighbor because of our faith in God, but this faith in God and love of the neighbour is contrary to the values of the unbelieving world. Therefore, a declaration of unwavering faith toward God and unconditional faith toward the neighbor is not considered as virtue by the world but is rejected as folly by the world. As a consequence, Christians will be despised and even persecuted just as Christ was despised and persecuted. While human beings naturally shun suffering and persecution, Christians should expect them and even welcome them as the cross which all followers of Christ must take up for ourselves. Suffering therefore, is a form of following Christ; as Bonhoeffer famously said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Following Christ, or Christian discipleship in modern parlance, is to follow Christ in suffering and even death. This suffering is used by God to purge the Christian of the “old self”. Persecution and suffering is God’s alien work which accomplishes his proper work: cleansing the Christian of the old sinful self and thus conforming to Christ. Therefore, Christians should not shun suffering but to welcome it and endure it by God’s grace.

Christ’s cross and the Christian’s cross

The Scriptures disclose the “holy cross” as characteristic of the holy One and his people, says Luther. Far from removing adversity,\(^544\) the cross reveals that Christ and all his followers must face adversity. In the first Postil on Philippians 4:4–7, Luther declares that the world fears and hates God. When faith is lacking, the sinner always lives in fear of the wrath of God and therefore hates God; God is his enemy.\(^545\) It is on account of this fear and hatred that sinners put Christ on the cross. As Christians are followers of Christ and therefore hated as well, Luther insists that suffering is inevitable for the Christian. We are “called to suffer persecutions”; it is the natural consequence of our rejection of the devil and our allegiance to Christ.\(^546\) At the same time, suffering is a badge of honour for the Christian. It is a sign of “his holy, precious, noble and happy calling unto eternal life”.\(^547\)

In the first Postil on 1 Peter 2:20–25, Luther maintains that a Christian’s lot is persecution, torture, and even murder because the world regards believers as contemptible and disgraceful. Christians could avoid suffering if they chose to, but in order to do so they would need to forsake Christ and conform to the world.\(^548\) He affirms in the Postil on John 16:16–23 that “it is therefore the lot of the Christian constantly to suffer misfortune, persecution, trials and adversity.”\(^549\) The second Postil on John 16:5–15 contains a warning that after we are freed from sin and justified by Christ, Satan and the world will rise up and battle against us, which is why all true Christians must brace themselves for persecution and the cross.\(^550\)

In the Postil on Luke 2:33–40, Luther maintains that the church, the pastors, and

\(^{544}\) Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 6, 43.
\(^{545}\) Ibid., 93.
\(^{546}\) Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7, 250.
\(^{547}\) Ibid., 251.
\(^{548}\) Ibid., 249.
\(^{549}\) Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 79.
\(^{550}\) Ibid., 131.
followers will all be subjected to ignominy on earth. The Word of God appears to be a Word of wrath and trouble, since it is on account of that Word that the world and the devil persecute Christians. The Gospel is an intolerable offence to the world and is considered by the theologians of glory to be a great folly and error, a gift from hell. As a result, they regard the persecution of true preachers as a service to God. Nevertheless, by faith Christians realize that the Word is a “Word of grace, love and of the peace of God and Christ toward us”. Lutheran insists that “it is impossible for that which is wise, prudent, great, handsome, mighty and powerful before the world to agree with the Word of God”; for this reason the Word and the people of the Word will always be persecuted in the world. Indeed, suffering for God’s kingdom is a sure sign that we belong to it.

In the first Postil on 1 John 3, Luther describes the character of Cain, who is a type of all theologians of glory. He is “clever, wise, holy and in every way vastly Abel’s superior”. He represents all things desirable in human beings; even his children are great inventors. Yet he is arrogant, exalting himself above all others, claiming God’s favour, and despising his brother. When God raises Abel above him, he becomes angry. He murders his brother in defiance of God, believing he is in the right and that God is the offending party.

Abel, meanwhile, is the type of all theologians of the cross. And since all Christians – theologians and common believers alike – are marked by the cross, Lutheran states matter-of-factly that suffering is the Christian’s lot in life. As Abel’s faithful deed incurred the violence of Cain, the Christian should not expect anything from the world except persecution in return for the good

---

551 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 266.
553 Ibid., 333–4.
554 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5, 303–4.
555 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 8, 382.
556 Ibid., 49–50.
557 Ibid., 47.
works she has done. Luther is so adamant about suffering being an essential part of Christian life that he goes so far as to say that if we do not suffer with and for Christ, “Christ certainly will not at the last day acknowledge you as a brother and fellow-heir.” If we have not experienced persecution, and have not suffered the nails of the cross, he will not “regard you as his brother.”

In his *Postil* on the parable of the seed, Luther distinguishes three types of Christian. There are Christians who receive the Word with joy. They understand the Gospel and know that they may be saved without works. Yet when suffering comes, they are unable to withstand “harm, disgrace and loss of life or property”, so they fall away from faith. Another set of Christians also hear and understand the Word, but they enjoy peace and pleasure more than the Word and fall away on account of the “pleasures and cares of this life”. But the true Christians are the ones who not only hear and understand the Word but are willing to keep it and bear fruit from it; they are willing to give up peace, pleasure, and the “good life” and bear all kinds of suffering on account of the Word. These are the ones who persevere in doing good to their neighbour in love. These ones will need to endure “shame and disgrace from fanatics and heretics, hatred and jealousy with injury to body and property from their persecutors, not to mention what the thorns and the temptations of their own flesh do.” Luther concludes that they must “bear the cross and misfortune, and triumph”.

Simeon and Mary are also put forward as types of the theologians of the cross. Simeon is a “lover of the cross and an enemy of the world” who gladly endures poverty, disgrace, death

---

558 Ibid., 49.
559 Ibid., 100.
560 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2, 116.
561 Ibid.
562 Ibid., 117.
and ignominy for Christ’s sake.\textsuperscript{563} Mary is despised by the world for becoming pregnant before marriage; she becomes married, but is widowed not long after. Widowhood is a tragic situation in life. The world considers her a person to be pitied. Yet, it is this Mary whom Simeon blessed; his blessing is not that of the world but is God’s blessing, and contrary to the expectations of the world. It is a “spiritual and divine benediction”.\textsuperscript{564}

In the first \textit{Postil} on Luke 17:11–19, Luther exhorts the believers to “break forth with the voice, and to confess before the world what the heart within believes of God”. But to do so is to invite the enmity of the world, because when we honour and praise God we no longer praise and honour the people of the world, and the world cannot tolerate this. It will surely accuse the confessing Christian of being “a heretic, a deceiver, a blasphemer”.\textsuperscript{565} Yet faith must not be hidden, as Luther again insists in the first \textit{Postil} on John 15:26–16:4. While faith begins in the heart, it should continue on to public confession that Jesus is Lord. This public confession, however, invites persecution from Satan and the world; hence we must confess that God alone is the Saviour and at the same time brace for persecution from the world,\textsuperscript{566} expecting the cross to follow confession.

It may even appear to the world that what we do is contrary to God and the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{567} At this point Luther warns against “reasonable thinking”. Reason thinks the Gospel can be preached in a peaceful and attractive way, without causing resistance and upheaval; but this is “the utterance of Satan”, Luther warns, because the Gospel that proclaims Christ as Lord and Saviour necessarily overturns the pride and security of the world. The world cannot allow the

\textsuperscript{563} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 265–6.
\textsuperscript{564} Ibid., 267–8.
\textsuperscript{565} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 5, 94.
\textsuperscript{566} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 245–6.
\textsuperscript{567} Ibid., 247.
existence of another Saviour apart from itself, and will therefore surely persecute Christ and all those who confess him. \(^{568}\) At the same time, Luther points to Christ’s words as comfort to the confessing Christian. We must not think that the open confession of our faith is utterly useless, or that we should keep our silence since no one will believe. Christ does not want us to be discouraged or despair in such a way. He comforts and strengthens his disciples by promising the sending of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who will give them “courage and strength to withstand the enmity of the world and the fear of the devil”, enabling them to bear Christ’s witness confidently to the world. \(^{569}\)

Luther reminds us that cross-bearing is also inevitable in our service of the neighbour. In the first *Postil* on Matthew 18:23–5, he insists that the theologians of the cross must be willing to give up everything they have in order to serve the neighbour. We should not insist upon our own rights, as the theologians of glory would, but be willing to suffer for our neighbour’s sake. \(^{570}\) In God's kingdom, maintains Luther, there is no demand for rights and dues but only “pure brotherly service and kindness”. \(^{571}\)

Human reason compels the theologians of glory to flee from poverty, disgrace, and shame, says Luther; they wish never to suffer such misfortune. \(^{572}\) They always shun the cross and hate its contemptible appearance. Furthermore, they disregard the poor and persecute the lowly, refusing to bless them just as they did not bless the lowly Christ child. \(^{573}\) Luther exhorts the theologian of the cross to learn from Paul, who is willing to suffer for the sake of the

---

\(^{568}\) Ibid., 249.
\(^{569}\) Ibid., 256.
\(^{570}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 280.
\(^{571}\) Ibid., 281.
\(^{572}\) Ibid., 177–8.
\(^{573}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 265.
Ephesians. All Christians should emulate Paul and suffer willingly for the sake of others.\footnote{Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 264.}

Though Paul suffered humiliation and persecution, he trusts in God alone and rejoices in God and his blessings. In the \textit{Postil} on Ephesians 3:13–21, Luther uses the experience of Paul to illustrate again the hiddenness of the glory and honour of God: as the great apostle sits in prison, the world sees only disgrace, dishonour, suffering, and defeat, while the Christian by faith sees the honour and glory of God.\footnote{Ibid., 265–6.} Like Paul, the theologian of the cross relies not on his own powers and wisdom but on God’s grace alone, receiving strength in his inner person. By faith he appropriates God’s abundance and riches and God himself.\footnote{Ibid., 276.}

In the first \textit{Postil} on Hebrews 9:11–15, Luther speaks of the hidden character of the virtues of the cross. Christ’s sacrificial office is adorned with “divine love, wisdom, patience, obedience and all virtues”, but this is apparent only to faith.\footnote{Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 163–4.} Even the fact that Christ offered himself on the cross as a sacrifice for sin is not apparent: while the material cross is visible, no one recognizes it as the altar of sacrifice. Not only is the sacrificial nature of Christ and his death hidden from human reason, the blessings and benefits of this sacrifice are also hidden, so that even as we receive the blessings of salvation in this life, they are appropriated only by faith. Only at the \textit{eschaton} will “all the blessings of divine grace” be revealed and therein rendered indisputable.\footnote{Ibid., 166.} Furthermore, suffering and persecution, though inevitable for the Christian, is a “blessing in disguise” because God promises to be with us in our suffering. Luther maintains that we shall not find God anywhere else other than in “the despised man Christ” because God has concealed himself in this man;\footnote{Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 5, 95–6.} God is concealed in the suffering Christ. At the same time,
Christ suffers with and through the suffering of the apostles and martyrs. Luther therefore encourages the Christian to welcome suffering and persecution because of Christ.

**Bearing the Cross as a Form of Following Christ**

We should bear the cross because cross-bearing is a form of following Christ. We are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ. Christ suffered out of his love for humankind; we Christians are exhorted to “follow the same example of love, and offer ourselves for the welfare of our neighbor, with all we have.” As followers of Christ, we should “cheerfully suffer want and temptation for the service of God and the good of our neighbor, like (sic) Christ did for us, as often as necessity requires it.” After all, as wayfarers in this world Christians ought to view the world, its government, and all temporal affairs from the perspective of guests passing through a foreign land, and must therefore never seek satisfaction in this life as if it were our home. At the same time, Luther urges the Christian not to flee from the world. Rather, he maintains, it is our “heart which must flee, and that by keeping itself ‘unspotted from the world’”. Our feet, on the other hand, must be planted firmly in this world in order for us to serve our neighbours with love.

In the *Postil* on Romans 8 Luther reminds Christians that we are co-heirs, co-martyrs, and co-sufferers with Christ. Many Christians would gladly receive the inheritance from Christ while shunning the suffering, but Luther insists that the inheritance is given only as a consequence of our suffering for Christ: “Since Christ, our dear Lord and Savior, had to suffer

---

580 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 265.
581 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 96.
582 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 2, 129.
583 Ibid., 136.
584 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 281.
585 Ibid., 281–2 [italics mine].
586 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 97.
before he could be glorified, we must be martyrs with him, with him be mocked by the world, despised, spit upon, crowned with thorns and put to death, before the inheritance will be ours. It cannot be otherwise.”⁵⁸⁷ To be co-heirs with Christ, Christians must share all the good and the bad with him.⁵⁸⁸ In the same way that we share in Christ’s blessings, we should share in his sufferings by sharing the suffering of our neighbour. And it is not enough for us merely to be sympathetic to the suffering of others, says Luther; we must actually share their suffering.⁵⁸⁹ Nor ought we to do so in a way that is superficial: just as “our blissful inheritance through brotherhood and joint-heirship with Christ is not a mere fancy and false hope of the heart, but a real inheritance, so our sympathy must amount to real suffering, which we take upon ourselves as befitting joint-heirs.”⁵⁹⁰ In short, Christ is our supreme example.

In the third Postil on John 10:11–16, Luther cites Christ’s example again, exhorting preachers and pastors to bear with the weak and erring as Christ bore with us. Christ bore with our weaknesses in the patient expectation of our growing stronger. In the same way, preachers and pastors should conduct themselves patiently toward the weak, waiting and encouraging them to grow.⁵⁹¹ He who was innocent in all respects suffered for sinners in order to save us; while his cross is unique and irreplaceable, we are nonetheless to emulate him in his willingness to suffer for the sake of others.⁵⁹² Luther calls suffering a “great grace” because Christ himself suffered; this fact makes suffering “so precious that no one is worthy of it”.⁵⁹³

Christ is not only our example in cross-bearing, he is also our inspiration. Luther insists that “when we fully believe in our Savior’s love, then our own hearts respond with perfect love

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.
⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.
⁵⁸⁹ Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 8, 97–8.
⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 98.
⁵⁹¹ Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 69–70.
⁵⁹² Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 251–2.
⁵⁹³ Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 96.
What is our comfort in times of suffering? What gives us strength when bearing the cross? It is that Christ has willingly suffered alongside us:

If a day of sorrow or sickness weighs you down, think, how trifling that is compared with the thorns and nails of Christ. If you must do or leave undone what is distasteful to you: think, how Christ was led hither and thither, bound and a captive. Does pride attack you: behold, how your Lord was mocked and disgraced with murderers. Do unchastity and lust thrust themselves against you: think, how bitter it was for Christ to have his tender flesh torn, pierced and beaten again and again. Do hatred and envy war against you, or do you seek vengeance: remember how Christ with many tears and cries prayed for you and all his enemies, who indeed had more reason to seek revenge. If trouble or whatever adversity of body or soul afflict you, strengthen your heart and say: Ah, why then should I not also suffer a little since my Lord sweat blood in the garden because of anxiety and grief? That would be a lazy, disgraceful servant who would wish to lie in his bed while his lord was compelled to battle with the pangs of death.

Luther himself suffered much in his defence of the Word. For instance, there was a price on his head from his memorable encounter with Johann Eck in 1521 until his demise in 1546: twenty-five years spent under sentence of death. He willingly bore this cross because “I should stake all that I have and suffer all that they do, in order that the honor of God and of his Word may not be injured. For if I perish, no great harm is done; but if I let God’s Word perish, and I remain silent, then I do harm to God and to the whole world.”

Luther exhorts the suffering Christian not to repay evil with evil. He acknowledges that when evil is returned for benevolence, it is beyond the power of flesh and blood to restrain ourselves. But we should learn to commit the matter into God’s hands, trusting that he is the righteous judge who will not allow the persecution of his faithful to go unpunished. We are also to set our eyes on Christ, following in his example, and pray for the repentance of the

---

594 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 51.
596 Ibid., 175–6.
wrongdoers. In the second Postil on James 1:16–21, Luther reminds us that the blessings God bestows on us far exceed our trials and tribulations, and should be kept in mind when we are assailed by the world. Our awareness of God’s overflowing blessing will give us strength to withstand persecution. How can the theologian of the cross triumph over the world? We triumph over the devil and the world with meekness and patience, declares Luther; that is how we can hold on to the Word and contend against sin. He exhorts the Christian to love Christ and to hold Christ’s name, his Word, and his kingdom dearer than anything else in the world. We are not to rely on our own strength and wisdom but on Christ, and in this way contend with poverty, misery, and death.

Bearing the Cross as a Form of Self-denial and Cleansing of the Old Self

Cross-bearing is also a form of self-denial. Luther contends that the “self” needing to be denied is our old sinful self. Taking off the old self and putting on the new one requires that we realize the extent of our sinfulness and then purge it with the help of the Holy Spirit. In the Postil regarding the temptation of Christ, Luther describes how Christ was led into the wilderness and left all alone, stripped of all means of self-support. This is our model: we must also experience utter loneliness and helplessness. This kind of suffering is “the true school”, where “I learn what I am, how weak my faith is, how great and rare true faith is, and how deeply unbelief is entrenched in the hearts of all men.” Suffering allows us to see our true sinful selves. The cross, too, reveals our sinnership and God’s great wrath against sin.

Suffering is also the means used by the Holy Spirit to rid us of our old self and bring

---

597 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 258–64.
598 Ibid., 291.
599 Ibid., 299.
600 Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 310–11.
601 Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 137.
602 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 190–1.
about our transformation into the Christ like new self. In the Postil on John 16:16–23, Luther explains why God allows his own children to be persecuted: in order to “suppress and subdue” our rebellious self-will. God wills that we forsake our own wisdom and become fools, depending solely on God. Luther calls our old self “our miserable beggar’s bag”. The Holy Spirit helps us to confront this old self, “not only to preach the Word to us, but also to enlarge and impel us from within, yea, even to employ the devil, the world and all kinds of afflictions and persecutions to this end.” Internal and external sufferings are therefore necessary in order to kill the old self. Luther not only affirms the need to mortify our flesh, but also insists that this is a spiritual sacrifice initiated by the Spirit. This mortification of the flesh needs to be done daily; in the first Postil on 1 Corinthians 5:6–8, Luther maintains that Christ uses crosses and afflictions to purge us daily of our sinful self.

Since all the world is affected by sin, not only we Christians need the cross to purge us of our sinfulness; all creation is a “martyr”. In the Postil on Romans 8 Luther maintains that all creation bears the cross, enduring the injustices and evils of this world. All creatures suffer and endure in the hope of a “better dispensation in the fulfillment of time”.

At the same time, not all suffering is necessary, and suffering of itself is not a virtue. Luther maintains that suffering for non-spiritual matters is not necessary. The Papists insist upon penance not to mortify the flesh but to gain merit, and these self-inflicted “sufferings” are

---

604 Luther, Sermons, vol. 2, 253.
605 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 10.
606 The first thesis of The Ninety-Five Theses states that “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” Timothy Lull, editor., Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 21.
607 Ibid., 188.
609 Ibid., 109–10.
610 Ibid., 366.
not pleasing to God.  

On the positive side, cross-bearing strengthens faith. In the Postil on the temptation of Christ, Luther exhorts the believer to learn from Christ. After forty days and nights, Christ was desperately hungry; that is when the temptation came for him to put his faith in his own methods, methods suggested by the devil, in order to obtain food. This temptation to put faith in our own methods rather than trust in God is common to all people. The pastoral Luther points out that “this temptation is very common also among pious people, and they especially feel it keenly who have children and a family, and have nothing to eat.” But we must resist this temptation just as Christ did; just as he clung to the Word, so must we. If we put our faith in God and his Word, we will be blessed in two ways. First, we will be nourished by the Word; and second, physical nourishment will finally arrive, as promised by the Word. In times of trials and affliction our eyes see hopelessness, but when we turn to the Word, our ears hear the comforting promise of Christ that the suffering will last only a little while. We must hold fast to what we hear, and not rely on what we see. In this way our faith is strengthened by suffering. Luther affirms that “the cross, temptation and opposition must come, by means of which faith will grow and become strong.” He also insists that opposition makes the truth of the Gospel more evident: “the more the wisdom of the world opposes the truth, the purer and clearer does the truth become, consequently the Gospel can experience nothing better than that the world rise up against it with all its force and wisdom.”

---

611 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 10.
613 Ibid., 139.
614 Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 76.
615 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 259.
616 Note here that “Gospel” is Luther’s abbreviation of “Christ’s people who are formed and identified by the Gospel.”
617 Ibid., 299.
Elsewhere in the *Postils* Luther names many benefits of suffering. First he exhorts theologians of the cross to learn patience from the Corinthians, whom Paul commends for bearing patiently with the foolish, the oppressors, persecutors, takers, those who exalt themselves, and those who smite them in the face.⁶¹⁸ Then Luther maintains that God permits the Christian to fall into sin just as David did in order that she may learn from her weakness and be strengthened in faith.⁶¹⁹ Furthermore, explains Luther in the first *Postil* on Luke 7:11–17, God allows us to suffer so that we may constantly think of him, that we may not live in ignorant bliss and discount the abundant blessings which he has bestowed on us.⁶²⁰ Similarly, in the *Postil* on Colossians 1:3–14, Luther maintains that God sends temptations, sorrow, and affliction upon the Christian in order to “create and stimulate” a hunger and thirst in us for the full knowledge of God and his will.⁶²¹ And in the second *Postil* on Luke 7:11–17, Luther maintains that sometimes God sends trials and tests for Christians in order to see if they will remain faithful and steadfast.⁶²²

Luther maintains that joy and comfort go hand-in-hand with the cross and persecution. Since our joy and comfort reside in Christ, Christians receive greater joy and comfort as we walk toward him. But the world and the devil hope to derail us through the cross and persecution, so that the closer we come to Christ, the greater the suffering becomes.⁶²³ Christians should not be discouraged by suffering, however, for while the theologians of glory always deal with visible things that can be experienced and comprehended, the theologians of the cross deal with the invisible spiritual things, things that can be perceived only by the eyes of faith. Faith “lays hold

---

⁶¹⁸ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 108.
⁶¹⁹ Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, 262–3.
⁶²⁰ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 132.
⁶²¹ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 364.
⁶²² Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 143.
of things that are not seen”.⁶²⁴ We can therefore rejoice amidst suffering, declares Luther, because “the farther earthly advantages are removed, the nearer is God with his eternal blessings.” Theologians of the cross will not avoid the cross but will endure patiently until the persecutions “wear themselves out upon us, and lose their power”.⁶²⁵ The theologians of glory rejoice “when they should grieve, and grieve when they should rejoice”, unaware that it is precisely in our most trying hour that joy is needed and supplied.

Lastly, suffering trains the Christian to hope; in the first Postil on Romans 15:4–13, Luther maintains that “suffering and persecution contribute to the increase of hope.” Hope is instilled in us by the Holy Spirit in order to combat adversity.⁶²⁶ We can cling to the hope that all suffering, persecution, and temptation will last only for a limited time, and that we will receive peace and joy when all the suffering is over.⁶²⁷ This joy grows ever stronger even as the devil tries to tear it from us; it is an eternal joy bestowed by God.⁶²⁸ Luther argues in the Postil for Epiphany that the Christian will desire even greater affliction after she has endured suffering, because the process of enduring affliction brings her nearer to God. She does not try to avoid the “unattractive life” of a Christian, for she realizes that it is in apparent disgrace that Christ is found.⁶²⁹

Luther maintains that the world cringes from suffering because human reason perceives suffering as failure and defeat. The theologians of the cross, however, realize that suffering is God’s peculiar instrument by which he defeats the devil. Luther insists that the greater the

---

⁶²⁴ Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 145.
⁶²⁶ Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 63.
⁶²⁷ Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 92.
⁶²⁸ Ibid., 95.
⁶²⁹ Luther, Sermons, vol. 1, 362–3.
suffering, in fact, the faster the Christian movement grows.\textsuperscript{630} Moreover, Christians can be comforted in the knowledge that Christ is ever ready to help us; just as we are attacked, he is right there to help us.\textsuperscript{631} Therefore, we should not fear the powers of this world. Instead, counter-intuitively, we should “fear our prosperity and good days which cause us more harm than our anguish and persecution.”\textsuperscript{632}

\textbf{God Comforts Us in the Midst of Suffering}

Luther assures the believer that God gives the cross to each according to the ability to carry it. Even so, the cross would be too heavy for the individual to carry without the comfort that God bestows.\textsuperscript{633} Christians should rejoice in suffering because God himself is our comfort and intends to comfort us in our hour of need; in fact, suffering is an instrument God uses to deliver comfort. In the second \textit{Postil} on John 16:16–23, Luther declares, “Whenever [God] wants to comfort them, he first plunges them into similar anxiety and temptation.”\textsuperscript{634} When we feel anguish and despair, when we feel that surely no one can help and comfort us and that God himself is against us, the truth is in fact the opposite: God is near us and his comfort will come if we but endure a little longer.\textsuperscript{635} Theologians of the cross must cling to Christ’s promise that he will not leave them in misery.\textsuperscript{636}

We will find God’s comfort in his Word, says Luther; the mission of Scripture is to comfort,\textsuperscript{637} and it does comfort and strengthen us in the midst of suffering.\textsuperscript{638} In the \textit{Postil} on

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{630} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 5, 299.
\item\textsuperscript{631} Ibid., 300.
\item\textsuperscript{632} Ibid., 299.
\item\textsuperscript{633} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 88.
\item\textsuperscript{634} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 89.
\item\textsuperscript{635} Ibid., 90.
\item\textsuperscript{636} Ibid., 90–1.
\item\textsuperscript{637} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 43–4.
\item\textsuperscript{638} Ibid., 43.
\end{footnotes}
Luke 2:33–40, Luther counsels the Christian not to expect praise and blessing from the world but to expect reproach and contempt.639 The world offers no comfort to the Christian; the only comfort she can expect is from the Word of God, which praises and blesses those who are forsaken by the world.640 Luther exhorts the suffering Christian to cling to the Scriptures for comfort,641 since the Scriptures promise blessing for those persecuted by the world. He insists that the Scriptures have the power to comfort us;642 in fact, the power of God’s Word rises in proportion to the pressure it receives, a pressure exerted by our trust in it when we are weak. Luther defines “weakness” as being regarded worthless, unfit, and a failure.643 Weakness in this sense is external and includes physical illnesses, misfortune, and suffering. The paradox of the cross is that what is regarded as weak is actually strong: God’s strength is in our weakness, and is a “strange kind of strength which is weak and by its weakness grows stronger”—in other words, the strength is increased by weakness. When Luther insists that God’s power, which is his Word, “rises in proportion to the pressure it receives”, it is a way of saying that when we are weak and the pressure is high, God’s strength shines forth.644 Luther therefore urges the Christian to hold fast to God’s Word when faced with the devil and the world.645

The hope of the suffering Christian is in the promise of future joy and glory. In view of this fact, Luther exhorts the Christian to turn his back to the world and his face to the future revelation.646 In the third Postil on John 14:23–31, Luther maintains that the cross of Christ,

---

639 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 266.
640 Ibid.
641 Ibid., 266–7.
642 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 42–3. Needless to say, Luther always has in mind that Scripture comforts inasmuch as Scripture is the manger which the Christ-child laid; Christ is accessed only through the manger and Christ alone is the Christian’s comfort.
643 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 113.
644 Ibid., 117.
645 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 333.
646 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 98.
which is unattractive to the world, provides comfort, strength, victory, life, and salvation for those who seek God’s treasure through faith.\textsuperscript{647} It is the sign of Christ’s triumph over sin, death, and the devil, and therefore provides comfort. It is not by his divine power that Christ defeats the devil, but by “the weakness of his suffering and death”,\textsuperscript{648} that is, the cross. Luther opines that if Christians are not willing to suffer for Christ, it is because they lack faith in that victory; they have not seen with the eyes of faith the future glory which is hidden to mortal eyes.\textsuperscript{649} The eyes of faith allow us to see Christ’s victory on the cross even in the hour of our greatest need.\textsuperscript{650} Human reason sees Christians only as wretched, tormented, and persecuted people, and sometimes even the faithful perceive only misfortune and suffering; it seems God has abandoned them. The theologians of glory live in “enjoyment of honor and fortune, of happiness, power and riches”, while the theologians of the cross lie “prostrate under the weight of the cross”.\textsuperscript{651} But this state of affairs is only temporary. God does not permit the Christian to suffer forever.

**Prayer Is Essential to the Christian Life**

Luther maintains that prayer is essential to the suffering Christian. Since God’s comfort is promised to those who suffer for his sake, and since his victory over sin and evil is guaranteed by the cross, it behooves us to come to him in prayer when visited by affliction and persecution.

Luther insists that “the chief thing in prayer is faith.” Faith clings to God’s promises and waits patiently when the petition is not immediately granted.\textsuperscript{652} Faith naturally teaches a person how to pray: indeed, true faith is pure prayer. Faith looks for divine grace and desires it, and this

\textsuperscript{647} Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 326.
\textsuperscript{648} Ibid., 339.
\textsuperscript{649} Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 101.
\textsuperscript{650} Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 338.
\textsuperscript{651} Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 381.
\textsuperscript{652} Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 40.
desire for God’s grace is true prayer. In the first Postil on Luke 17:11–19, Luther maintains that faith leads to prayer: it is “a characteristic of faith to presume to trust God’s grace”, making the Christian brings her troubles to God and prays for help. Luther points to the leper in this passage as an example whose faith urges him to cry out to Christ for help. Christians are exhorted to “raise the voice” and go forward to meet Christ as the leper did. Unbelief wavers and is not sure of the effects of prayer, but true faith clings to the “good and gracious will of God”.

In the Postil on Prayer Sunday, Luther laments that the Christians of his day do not pray, and denounces the processions with crosses on Prayer Sunday because no prayer is practised. Even though the cross is shown to all and the day is supposed to be dedicated to prayer, no prayer is offered and all crosses of suffering are shunned by the spiritual leaders. Luther exhorts the theologians of the cross to engage in earnest prayer, reminding them that Christ is the Mediator and High Priest through whom God promises to hear all prayers. He promises to hear our prayers for deliverance, and wishes us to pray not only for ourselves but also sincerely for the conversion of all. It should be the desire of every Christian that the entire world should hear the Gospel and repent, making such prayer the “earnest outflow of the true Christian’s heart”.

Luther outlines what constitutes true prayer:

1. God’s promise
2. Our faith
3. Definite items of petition

---

653 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 70.
654 Ibid., 64.
656 Ibid.
657 Luther, Sermons, vol. 8, 340.
4. Sincere desire for the granting of the petition

5. Invocation of the Name of Jesus

All prayer is predicated on God’s promise, declares Luther. It is the “chief thing and is the foundation and power of all prayers.” Without God’s promise all prayers are “uncertain delusion and a melancholy spirit.” Many theologians of glory in Luther’s day thought that by good deeds they merited God’s consideration in prayer. Others were afraid that they were unworthy to pray because of their sins. Luther maintains that the basis for our prayer is not our worthiness but God’s promise. Since all are sinners, no one is “worthy” to pray, but it is precisely because of our unworthiness that we should pray: being unworthy, we put no confidence in ourselves but cling only to God’s promise. Christians should take “confidence not from your own doings, but from the promise of God, and be so completely conscious, that if you were all alone, and no one else in the world prayed, you would nevertheless pray, because of this promise.”

Luther points to faith as the second requisite of true prayer. God has promised to hear our prayers, but we must also believe in God’s promises. Faith is “a firm, undoubting confidence in God’s promise that it is true.” Nevertheless, this faith does not originate with us but is imparted by the Holy Spirit. Luther is adamant that “without the Holy Spirit, surely no prayer will be offered.”

God’s promise is the basis of all prayer, and faith is that which appropriates the promise. Yet prayer is not without specific content. Luther insists that “one must name definitely something that he brings to God or for which he prays.” Just as the Lord’s Prayer has specific content, so our prayers should be specific; the Christian should pray for “strong faith, for love,

---

659 Ibid., 168–9.
660 Ibid., 169.
661 Ibid., 169–70.
for peace, and for the comfort of his neighbor.” At the same time, however, Luther cautions us not to go so far in prayer as to try to limit God’s work. We should pray for specifics, but we should leave to God the specific way, time, and place of the prayer’s fulfilment.

Our prayers should be not only specific but also sincere. We should not pray half-heartedly; we should ardently desire that our petition be granted. And finally, all prayer should be made in the name of Christ. Since Christ is our Mediator, no prayer will be heard without him, and all prayers in his name are surely heard by God.

In addition, Luther cautions Christians who pray but do not give thanks when prayer is answered. They are like the nine lepers who do not return to say thank you to Christ. It would have been better for these lepers had they not been cured, because although their physical body is cleansed, they have contracted a more dangerous “spiritual leprosy”.

To summarize, Christians will face persecution and suffering in the course of their attempt to love the neighbour. Unconditional love for others is diametrically opposite to the self-centredness of the world. The world will despise, reject and even persecute Christians just as it has persecuted Christ. Christians ought not to shun suffering but to welcome it in solidarity with Christ’s suffering and to endure it by faith in God’s merciful deliverance. Suffering is also the alien work used by God to rid the Christian of her old sinful self. The Christian is called to a daily repentance. Suffering for the sake of Christ, faith and the neighbour is the concrete expression of that repentance.

---

662 Ibid., 170.
663 Ibid., 179.
664 Ibid., 170–1.
665 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 76.
Chapter 6
The Christian living between the Two Kingdoms

In chapter four we have discussed Luther’s ethics of the cross in general. After the Christian is justified by faith, she is now free to love. This love reaches out toward the neighbour and love of her neighbour is the key to all Christian ethics. One learns of this love of the neighbour from one’s observation of Christ on the cross. Christ is willing to go to the cross for the sake of the salvation of all humanity. Therefore, the Christian is to love the neighbour for the sake of Christ and in imitation of Christ.

In chapter five we discussed the place of the cross in the Christian’s life. While Christ died for us on the cross, he also appoints us to ours. The cross is inevitable for the Christian. Just as Christ is persecuted by the unbelieving world, his followers will also be persecuted. However, the cross is not to be born with distain. While the world persecutes Christians, God uses our sufferings to remove the “old self” from us. The cross is the tool which God uses to purge the remnants of sin from the Christian.

Up to now, we have only discussed ethics in theory. In the present chapter, we will examine the concrete application of Luther’s ethics of the cross. We will map out Luther’s concept of the two kingdoms and the Christian praxis of the cross in the kingdom of the world and kingdom of God respectively. Luther maintains that there are two kingdoms in the present age: the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world. Correspondingly, there are two governments given the authority by God to rule the world. Both are created by God and therefore are not antagonistic toward each other.

---

These two kingdoms are separate in that one governs spiritual matters while the other governs civil matters. Christian love is to be lived out in both of these kingdoms albeit in different manners toward different recipients. In the spiritual kingdom, which is the church, Christian love is exercised through the Word and Sacraments. In the civil kingdom, Christian love is carried out through the vocations or stations each Christian is assigned by God.

**The Kingdom of God**

The true believers of Christ belong to the Kingdom of God, for Christ is the king and lord of this kingdom. In the second *Postil* for the Fourth Sunday after Easter, Luther teaches that Christ’s kingdom is different from the temporal kingdom on earth. Christ shows the disciples the nature of his kingdom on earth in order to rid them of their old, deeply-rooted delusion of an external, worldly dominion and government over the Jewish people and the world in this life. Christ’s kingdom is an invisible, spiritual kingdom ruled by the Holy Spirit through the Word. It is not ruled by human wisdom, power, and might like the temporal government. In his tract *An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants*, Luther asserts that this kingdom is a “kingdom of grace and mercy, not of wrath and punishment. In it there is only forgiveness, consideration for one another, love, service, the doing of good, peace, joy, etc.” The world rules with power and might and seeks glory and honour on earth, while Christ rules in the hearts of believers. His government is not of power and might; he desires to “rule men’s hearts” so that they come to him of their own will.

---

668 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 134.
669 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 135.
671 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 308.
Christ does not resort to terror and threats to coerce obedience and make people tremble at the wrath of God, since these methods only lead to the certain result of “disobedience and sin”. Rather, Christ attracts followers with love and friendship so that they long to belong to him.\footnote{ibid., 308–9.} In the second \textit{Postil} on John 10, Luther calls Christ the Good Shepherd who is concerned with the weak and broken. He rules with mercy, while the other shepherds rule with force and severity. Christ gently comforts those who are weak in conscience and does not cast away those deficient in outward conduct. His kingdom consists not only of the strong and the whole; he is here to help the weak, poor, and sick.\footnote{Ibid., 22–3.} The pastoral Luther therefore invites those who are weak and in despair to come to the Lord and be made whole. Christ’s kingdom abounds with grace and mercy; he does not cast away sinners but strives to help those who are wretched and miserable.\footnote{Ibid., 23–4.} He seeks even those who are rejected by others—the publicans and prostitutes, the ones presumed lost and condemned with no hope of redemption. Christ rejects no one, but bids them come to him. The mercy of Christ wins our hearts and bids us to follow him.\footnote{Ibid., 25–6.}

\textbf{God’s Government}

The Kingdom of God is ruled by God’s government. Luther dismisses as fools those princes and bishops who attempt to “coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing this or that”.\footnote{Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed”, n.p., \textit{Luther's Works}, vol. 45, edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann on CD-Rom. 1999, c1965.} Rather, the Kingdom of God is to be governed by God’s divine word alone.\footnote{Ibid..}
Luther makes a distinction between the Kingdom of God and the church as an earthly institution. The church cannot command anything unless it is God’s Word; if the church issues commands which cannot be found in the Word of God, then it is “the devil’s apostles”. \(^{678}\) For this reason Luther criticizes the pope and the bishops who attempt to impose temporal rule over the people. These people put aside the duty to rule souls “inwardly by God’s word” in favour of ruling “castles, cities, lands, and people outwardly.”\(^{679}\) Similarly, Luther denounces temporal princes who exercise “absurdity” trying to rule over souls.

**The Kingdom of God Is Ruled by God’s Word**

In the second *Postil* on John 10, Luther maintains that there are two kinds of authority: the secular and the spiritual. The secular authority rules with the sword, but the spiritual authority rules only with the Word.\(^{680}\) This is also reflected in Luther’s tract *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should be Obeyed* where Luther dismisses princes and bishops who attempt to “coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing this or that” as fools.\(^{681}\) Rather, the Kingdom of God is to be governed by God’s divine Word alone.\(^{682}\)

While he supports the ruling of the temporal world by the sword, Luther opposes this way of ruling the spiritual kingdom: political rebels are to be dealt with by the sword, but heretics are to be dealt with in another way.\(^{683}\) The spiritual government is very different from the temporal government.

---

\(^{678}\) Ibid., 106.
\(^{679}\) Ibid., 109.
\(^{680}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 35.
\(^{682}\) Ibid.
\(^{683}\) Ibid. This is in contrast to Calvin, who supported the execution of Servetus. At the same time we must point out that the later Luther took a severe position regarding the Jews and even condoned violent treatment of Jews in his tract *On the Jews and their Lies*. 
government, says Luther, in that it exists alone “in the Word”. The first Postil for Pentecost Tuesday exhorts believers to lay down the sword and use the Word against the papists, for only the Word of God can take the sword away from the opponent. Theologians of the cross will let go of everything and use only the Word. Christ does not force anyone to believe; rather, the sheep follow the shepherd whom they know. For this reason Christ’s way is to “let the Word go forth and accomplish all. When their hearts are taken captive, then they will surely come of themselves. Faith does not go forth from the heart unless it has the Word of God.”

Luther does not forbid the sword; the sword is not used by the spiritual government because it cannot force the heart to believe, but it is – must – be used by the civil government where it serves to maintain order in the world.

Among Christians there are no “rulers”, because the governance of the Kingdom of God is a matter of service, not authority. Bishops and priests are not higher or better than other Christians, but “all are alike subject to one another.” The rule of the Kingdom of God is with the Word of God. In the second Postil on Matthew 22 Luther explains that the divine kingdom is maintained by the offices of the Word and of the sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of believers. And in the second Postil on Luke 14, he insists that God rules people through the preaching of the Gospel, showing them both “heaven and hell, death and life, wrath and grace.” Through the preaching of the Gospel God reveals to people their sinnership and awakens them to the fact of their certain and utter ruin. In this way God constrains them and

---

685 Ibid., 379.
686 Ibid., 380.
687 Ibid.
688 Ibid., 381.
690 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 238.
brings them to a desire for grace and salvation. The role of the Christian leader, therefore, is to inculcate God’s Word, allowing it to combat heresy. The Postil for John 10 contains another statement that the spiritual kingdom is ruled by the oral proclamation of the Gospel. The power and authority given to the apostles is the power and authority to preach in the spiritual kingdom. They are ordinary people and not considered worthy teachers by the world; the world despises them and will persecute them, but Christ has given them authority to preach and assurance of the efficacy of their preaching. In his Table Talk, when asked whether the words spoken by the minister in the sermon have the same effect as the words spoken by Christ, Luther answers with a categorical “Yes”. He quotes Luke 10:16, where Christ says, “He who hears you hears me,” and describes the preached word as the power of God.

An important characteristic of the teaching office of the apostles is its convicting nature: it convicts the world of sin. Luther calls this the office of conviction. It is not exercised by power or might but is the work of the Holy Spirit, which the world cannot suppress. The work of the Holy Spirit overcomes the world and convicts all. However, the efficacy of the preached Word does not mean that everyone will be saved; Luther maintains that only those who believe will receive salvation. Nevertheless, for those who reject the Word it remains efficacious, though in this case it is efficacious to their condemnation. The Word is “a power unto life and salvation to believers, and a preaching and power unto death to others”.

---

691 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 52.
694 Ibid., 135.
695 Martin Luther, “Table Talk”, No. 5177.
696 Ibid., 136.
697 Ibid., 137.
The Kingdom of the World

In contrast to the spiritual kingdom and spiritual government under Christ, God also created the temporal kingdom and authorized temporal governments. Both the spiritual and the temporal kingdoms belong to God, since he created both. The temporal kingdom belongs to God’s created order, and the purpose of its government is to protect the world. This kingdom is ruled by human wisdom and law. Luther affirms the role of human wisdom and justice insofar as they are operable in the temporal kingdom: they are capable of meeting the temporal needs of the people, but are of no value in the spiritual kingdom. The various offices within the temporal government are upheld by God, but its concern is not with Christ and the spiritual kingdom. Luther condemns temporal rulers who interfere in God’s work and his spiritual kingdom.

Everyone belongs to the kingdom of the world and is subject to its law. Luther maintains that one of the uses of the law is to restrain the wicked from evil deeds. The law restrains not only unbelievers but also those Christians who are not living by faith—Luther acknowledges that there are very few true believers, so few that “among thousands there is scarcely a single true Christian.” The sword is properly used in the kingdom of the world to hold back the wicked and protect the righteous.

Since only true believers belong to this kingdom and all true believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they should know what is right and wrong, says Luther, and should have no need of temporal law to provide guidance and boundaries: “Where there is nothing but the unadulterated doing of right and bearing of wrong, there is no need for any suit, litigation, court, judge,

---

698 Luther, Sermons, vol. 8, 351.
700 Ibid., 91.
penalty, law, or sword.” In fact, the righteous person should do more than the requirements of the law.

Luther defines “good works” carefully in his *Treatise on Good Works*. He faults his theological opponents for putting faith beside other virtues, as though faith were a good work of its own. Rather, faith is the prerequisite for all good works. Luther quotes Romans 14, “Whatsoever is not done of faith is sin,” and concludes that “everything a man does in faith is well done in God’s sight.” In fact,

[in this faith all works become equal, and one work is like the other; all distinctions between works fall away, whether they be great, small, short, long, many, or few. For the works are acceptable not for their own sake but because of faith, which is always the same and lives and works in each and every work without distinction, however numerous and varied these works always are.]

Therefore, a Christian living by faith alone “has no need of a teacher of good works, but he does whatever the occasion calls for, and all is well done.” This Christian can boldly do all things and be confident that whatever is done is pleasing to God, because faith seeks only what pleases God and not what is of benefit to oneself, including one’s own merit.

The unfortunate reality, which Luther acknowledges, is that Christians do not live by faith all the time. A Christian would have no need of the law if she lived by faith at all times, but since Christians often falter and exercise little faith, she requires the law at those times just as

---

702 Ibid.
704 Ibid. 26.
705 Ibid.
706 Ibid.
707 Ibid., 27.
surely as the unbeliever. The civil government is set up by God to maintain peace in the sinful world; if all were Christians and lived by faith all the time, then the civil government would not be needed.

Luther goes to great lengths to justify the existence of temporal authorities. He points out that it is because of God’s great mercy that the unmerciful sword is used in the temporal world. It must exercise wrath and severity in order to protect the righteous. Without the sword, the temporal world would lapse into anarchy and chaos. This is why Luther, who sided at first with the peasants in their revolt, turned against them and supported the use of the sword by the princes.

**Temporal Government**

In order to rid the world of temporal authorities, one would first need to “fill the world with real Christians”. Since this is not possible, temporal government and the use of the sword are a necessity in this imperfect world. Luther maintains that the civil government was established by God for the purpose of maintaining civil order and meeting the physical needs of the people. In the *Postil* on 1 Peter 5 he insists once again that the temporal government is ordained by God in order to preserve peace in the world, where the devil is at work. Without the civil government the world would be in chaos.

---

709 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 36.
712 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 212.
713 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 77.
This government insists upon the good behaviour of all its citizens, rewarding good
behaviour and punishing crime.\textsuperscript{714} In the first \emph{Postil} on 1 Peter 4, Luther maintains that punishing
the wicked is the domain of the civil government. Christians, even pastors, can as citizens
admonish and rebuke the neighbour who commits a crime, but the extent and manner of
punishment must be determined by the civil office.\textsuperscript{715} In the \emph{Postil} on Philippians 3 Luther makes
a distinction between the two governments and their differing responsibilities. He acknowledges
that when we observe the temporal authorities persecuting the Gospel, we are tempted to resist
them as enemies of Christ; nevertheless, he maintains, we must be obedient to them, “paying the
tribute and rendering the service imposed”. At the same time we have the comforting knowledge
that God will condemn them in his spiritual kingdom, where the enemies of Christ are consigned
to perdition.\textsuperscript{716}

In contrast with the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of the world is a kingdom of wrath
and severity. “In it there is only punishment, repression, judgment, and condemnation to restrain
the wicked and protect the good. For this reason it has the sword, and Scripture calls a prince or
lord ‘God’s wrath,’ or ‘God’s rod’ (Isaiah 14 [:5–6]).”\textsuperscript{717} Luther condemns the popes and their
followers for despising and even opposing the rulers of the temporal government. The pope
erroneously claims a divine right to oppose kings and emperors, but Luther rejects this right on
the basis that divine authority belongs to the spiritual kingdom, while temporal authority is given
to the kings and emperors. In any case, the spiritual kingdom is not ruled by power and might but
by the Word.\textsuperscript{718}

\textsuperscript{714} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 362.
\textsuperscript{715} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 275.
\textsuperscript{716} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 350.
\textsuperscript{717} Martin Luther, “An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants”, n.p., \textit{Luther’s Works}, vol. 46.edited by
\textsuperscript{718} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 5, 317.
Having outlined Luther’s understanding of the two kingdoms and two governments, we now turn to examine the ethics of the cross under these two kingdoms and governments. First, let us examine the spiritual kingdom and the spiritual government.

**The Marks and Ministries of the Church**

Though Luther distinguishes carefully between God’s spiritual kingdom and the Church as an institution, he nevertheless maintains that the Church is part of the spiritual kingdom and is ruled by Christ’s spiritual authority. Luther insists that the Marks of the Church are the Word and the Sacraments. The Christian’s ethical duty in the Church is always related to these two marks.

**The Primacy of the Word**

Luther is emphatic that the spiritual kingdom exists in the Word alone; while he upholds both the Word and sacraments as marks of the Church, he insists upon the primacy of the Word. In the *Postils* Luther affirms that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of believers through both Word and sacraments. The presence of the Holy Spirit comes to us through “the external office of preaching and through the sacraments”, and preaching and sacraments are the “office and gifts of the Holy Spirit.” At the same time, Luther insists that the office of preaching is more important than the office of sacraments because the Word is the substance of the sacraments.

Since the Marks of the Church are the Word and the Sacraments and the Word is the substance of both preaching and the sacraments, the Christian’s ethical duty in the Church is always related to these two marks.

---

719 Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3, 36–7.
720 Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 5, 238.
721 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 238.
722 Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7, 244–5.
Luther maintains in his tract *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* that there are only three Sacraments: baptism, penance (confession) and the bread (Lord’s Supper). Their effectiveness is derived from Christ’s promises (the Word). The Word is the substance of baptism, confession and the Lord’s Supper. Luther’s teachings in his *Postils* are consistent with his arguments in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. First, Christ’s kingdom is “founded upon the Word,” and by that he meant the Word preached. In the first Postil on John 10:1–11, Luther insists that “the office of preaching is second to none in Christendom.” When teaching about baptism, he insists that baptism is the sign and seal of our salvation as promised by the Word. When we appropriate Christ through faith, we are assured of our salvation because of the promises of the Word and baptism is the sign and seal of witness. Similarly in reference to the Lord’s Supper, Luther regards the preaching of Christ as the great and glorious supper, the true meal; it is this preached Word that feeds the Christians. Anyone who believes in Christ truly participates in this supper. It could be concluded from these observations that Luther consistently regards the Word as the substance of both Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Indeed Luther points to the Word as “the rule and touchstone by which the Church is to be discerned”. It is also by the Word that the Church is to be governed. Christ binds the Church to the Word and “makes that the distinguishing mark” of the Church: where you find “conformity to the Word . . . there you have discovered the right Church.” Luther says elsewhere that “wherever the doctrine is pure, there you can also keep purity in baptism, the

---

724 Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 4, 385.
725 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 373.
726 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 189.
727 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 43–4.
728 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 320.
sacrament, absolution, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, good works and all
callings.” Paul Althaus explains that Luther’s understanding of the sacraments cannot be
separated from his belief about the Word: “For Luther, a sacrament consists in the combination
of the word of promise with a sign,” he writes, continuing:

A sign or symbol alone does not constitute a sacrament. The symbolic act must
be instituted by God and combined with a promise. Sacramental character
ultimately depends on the presence of a divine word of promise. Where this is
missing, as in marriage or confirmation, one cannot speak of a sacrament. On the
other hand, however, there are realities and deeds in the Christian life such as
prayer, hearing and meditating on the word, and the cross, to which God has
attached a promise, but they lack the characteristic of a sign or a symbol. This is
the case, for example, in the so-called sacrament of penance.

To Luther, the sacraments are outward signs which accompany and subserve the Word.

In the second Postil on Ascension Day, Luther maintains that “God has always accompanied his
Word with an outward sign to make it the more effective to us.” Baptism and the Lord’s Supper
are both outward signs instituted by Christ “for use in times of temptation, and when death draws
near, that by it we might strengthen our faith, and remind God of his promise, and hold him to
it.” They are visible signs that strengthen faith by reminding believers of the promises of
God’s Word. Since Luther always maintains that the Gospel is God’s promises fulfilled in our
midst through Christ, the sacraments function ultimately to point believers to Christ, the Word of
God.

Baptism

In the Postils Luther asserts that baptism and the Lord’s Supper, like circumcision, are
external marks by which the people of God are to be identified. Circumcision is the external

---

729 Martin Luther, Sermons of Martin Luther, vol. 8, 301.
345.
731 Ibid., 345–6.
732 Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 203-204.
mark for the Jews just as baptism and the Eucharist are external marks for the Christian. These external marks and the reason for them are unintelligible to the world. Luther maintains that what God ordained for the church is foolish in the eyes of fallen human reason. He uses circumcision as an example: “is it not a foolish, ridiculous, useless command?” One can find no reason for God to use circumcision as the sign for his people. Similarly, baptism in water, and breaking bread and drinking wine in order to worship a Lord crucified on the cross, are both contrary to reason. Yet God gave us baptism as a visible sign of his unfailing grace in order to strengthen our faith; it is a public testimony to the Gospel, to our faith, and to the Lordship of Christ over us, and a sign and seal that we are the children of God and heirs of eternal life.

Since baptism is “nothing more than an outward sign”, Luther maintains that a person can believe even though not baptized. No one should despise baptism, but if it is “denied us” we will not be condemned. In the third Postil on Ascension Day, Luther affirms again that baptism is not essential to salvation. He acknowledges that “it has always unanimously been believed that a person dying a believer is not lost, though he be not baptized.” He makes the same point again in the second Postil on John 3:1–15. Baptism is a command of Christ to be kept, but “in an extreme case, where it cannot be obtained, there must be exceptions.” In the first Postil on Mark 16:14–20, Luther maintains that faith alone justifies, but baptism is ordained by Christ. It is not a work that we add on top of faith; rather, it is coupled with faith. “[I]t is necessary that we receive baptism if we are Christians,” declares Luther, but he does allow for the extraordinary

---

733 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, 310.
734 Ibid., 309.
735 Ibid., 309–10.
736 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 228.
737 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 234.
738 Ibid.
739 Ibid., 204. Although Luther never suggests that baptism is optional.
740 Ibid., 236.
741 Ibid., 436.
situation in which baptism is “beyond our reach”; in these cases, a sincere desire for baptism is enough.\textsuperscript{742} Baptism is the outward expression of our inward faith. God commands believers not to hide faith in the heart but to have it “burst forth and manifest itself to the world”. That is why he ordained baptism as the outward sign “by means of which everyone may show and confess his faith”. In addition, God ordained this outward confession so that “we may come to the holy cross”, for suffering and persecution will surely visit those who publicly confess Christ as their Lord.\textsuperscript{743}

How does one explain Christ’s teaching in John 3 that except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God? Luther explains that Christ was referring to the Holy Spirit as present in the rite of baptism.\textsuperscript{744} Although the Holy Spirit is invisible in his divine essence, he manifests himself through his external office, the Word;\textsuperscript{745} and since baptism is always accompanied by the Word and serves as the visible outward sign of the Word, the Holy Spirit is present through the Word in the rite of baptism. For this reason Luther elsewhere adds the sacraments to the external office of the Spirit, calling preaching and the sacraments the “office and gifts of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{746} Indeed, Luther insists that we cannot find the Spirit apart from the Word and sacraments.\textsuperscript{747}

Not only is the Holy Spirit present in baptism, Christ himself is present in baptism through the preached Word.\textsuperscript{748} In the first Postil on 1 John 5:4–12, Luther insists that Christ comes to us “through the preaching office”. The preaching office is his rule upon earth; it imparts to us the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{742} Ibid., 189.
\bibitem{743} Ibid., 188.
\bibitem{744} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 434.
\bibitem{745} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 244.
\bibitem{746} Ibid., 244–5.
\bibitem{747} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 434–5.
\bibitem{748} Luther insists everywhere that the Holy Spirit is the author of the written and preached Word, the substance of which is Jesus Christ the living Word.
\end{thebibliography}
“effective power of his shed blood”, the same power that accompanies the water of baptism to work “inward purification” upon us. Baptism is not a mere empty sign, insists Luther; it was ordained because it “embodied the power of both Christ’s death and resurrection.” Through baptism Christ “dedicates us to himself and imparts to us the power of his death and resurrection, to the end that both death and life may follow in us”. Christ also brings to us the “power and presence of the Holy Spirit”, who sanctifies us through the blood and water.

As for infant baptism, Luther explains that it does not depend on the faith of the child, who is not yet old enough to have a faith of her own; rather, the Christian community brings the child to baptism “in order that by rightly bringing it God may give it a faith of its own, that it may believe as I believe and be preserved in the same Word that Christ has given me.”

The Lord’s Supper

Throughout Luther’s life the battle for the purity and integrity of the Lord’s Supper was fought on two fronts: against the Papists who (a) lifted up the Mass as a sacrifice which can earn merit before God and (b) denied communion of both kinds to the laity; and against Zwingli and the Anabaptists regarding the “real presence” of Christ in the elements.

Though Luther did not write a systematic theology, his view of the Lord’s Supper is evident in his occasional writings: The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ and Concerning the Brotherhoods (1519), The Babylonian Captivity of the Church Part I (1520), The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ – Against the Fanatics (1526), and Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper (1528) all contain important statements on the Lord’s

---

749 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 243.
750 Luther, Sermons, vol. 8, 146.
751 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 208.
Supper. For the purpose of comparison with his Postils, a brief summary of Luther’s arguments from The Babylonian Captivity of the Church will review the chief points of contention.

Less than a year after his first tract The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ and Concerning the Brotherhoods, Luther followed up with The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. Where he was still cautiously critical in The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ and Concerning the Brotherhoods, he is now bold and frontal in his dispute with the Papists. This tract listed three captivities of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

The description of the first captivity is a continuation of The Blessed Sacrament. Luther decries the withholding of the use of both kinds from the laity. Conceding that both kinds are not necessary, he points out that the choice to partake of one or both is left to the individual and that the church usurps that choice when it withholds the use of both kinds. He calls the clergy sinners who “forbid the giving of both kinds to those who wish to exercise this choice. The fault lies not with the laity, but with the priests. The sacrament does not belong to the priests, but to all men.”

The second captivity is the doctrine of transubstantiation. Luther first began to be wary of this doctrine when he discovered that it was not always the doctrine of the church but was first adopted in the Middle Ages on the basis of Thomistic theology. Luther’s love for the Church Fathers and disdain for Aristotelian philosophy immediately caused him to be suspicious of this doctrine. Luther affirms with the Medieval Church’s view that Christ is present in the bread and wine, but he repudiates transubstantiation on the grounds that it is based on Aristotelian philosophy rather than Scripture. Luther upholds the bodily presence of Christ by upholding the

752 Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, vol. 36, 27.
753 Ibid., 29.
sensus literalis of the dominical pronouncement in the gospels: “This is my body.” He rejects the Aristotelian differentiation of substances and accidents. Scripture does not teach about substances and accidents. Furthermore, if one is to speak of accidents, then why limit it only to the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper and not speak it also of Mary’s womb or the sepulchre in which Christ was laid? Luther exhorts Christians to affirm the bodily presence of Christ by clinging to the words of Christ through faith; at the same time he warns Christians against speculating about the manner in which Christ is present in the elements.

The third captivity of the sacrament is that the Mass is considered a good work, a sacrifice. Luther regards this to be the worst offence of all. “This abuse has brought an endless host of other abuses in its train,” he writes, “so that the faith of this sacrament has become utterly extinct and the holy sacrament has been turned into mere merchandise, a market, and a profit-making business.”754 Here Luther reiterates that the Mass is Christ’s testament, and that a testament is a promise made by one about to die; the Mass is a promise of the forgiveness of sins, which was confirmed by the death of the Son of God.755 Since the Mass is a promise, it is not gained by works or merit but by faith alone. Hence “the only worthy preparation and proper observance is faith, the faith by which we believe in the mass, that is, in the divine promise…that is, prepare not to do or contribute much yourself, but to believe and accept all that is promised you there.”756 Luther consistently distanced himself from the notion that any human work or merit is involved in the Mass. Faith is all we need in order to receive the promise and the assurance of the promise in the sacrament.

754 Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, vol. 36, 35.
755 Ibid., 38.
756 Ibid., 43.
Luther’s *Postils* include very little material against the Zwinglian or Anabaptist view of the Lord’s Supper. Their main focus is to argue against the Papist view of the Mass as a sacrifice and against the Papist practice of withholding Communion in both kinds.

First, Luther rejects the notion of the Mass as a sacrifice, maintaining that “under the New Testament dispensation” Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is the only sacrifice. Comparing and contrasting sacrifices in the Old Testament and the New, he shows how the Old Testament sacrifices are types of the unique sacrifice of Christ, and the sacrifice of Christ is the only sacrifice in the New Testament. The New Testament does not ask us to offer up repeated sacrifices through the Mass, Luther points out; Paul only exhorts Christians to be *living* sacrifices themselves—by which he does not mean sacrifices in the sense of slaying live flesh, as the word “living” is to be understood spiritually with respect to our self-offering to God yet without any suggestion of atoning efficacy. We are to put off the old Adam daily, mortifying the lusts of the old self; this is the meaning of “living sacrifice”. Luther understood being “holy” as wholly belonging to God, meaning that “we let God alone work in us and we be simply his holy instruments.”

Next Luther accuses the Papists of using the Mass, fasting, praying, and other rites as means to obtain salvation. They therefore perform these rites in vain, because they forsake the living God for works. Luther refutes the merit of the Mass and points to faith in Christ as the only way of salvation. In the first *Postil* on John 6:44–51, Luther maintains that Christ is the

---

757 Because they were written before Luther turned his attention to Zwingli and to the Anabaptists.
759 Ibid., 12.
760 Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 7, 13.
761 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 14.
762 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 99.
living Bread, the partaking of which is “nothing but faith in Christ our Lord”. Partaking of Christ is our salvation. Luther also repeatedly denounces the conducting of anniversary masses and vigils, maintaining that these practices are useless as an attempt to earn merit or curry favour on behalf of the dead. When the priests and monks then charge fees for performing these rituals, it is “the work of Satan and is death itself”.

Third, Luther faults the religious elite of his day for perverting the Lord’s Supper and establishing two classes among Christians when they refuse to administer both elements to all believers. Only the priests receive both elements, while other Christians receive only one. This perverts the Sacrament whereby the body and blood of Christ are offered to all. At the same time it places priests in a higher order before God, above all other Christians.

On the positive side Luther explains the two uses of the Lord’s Supper. First, it is instituted by Christ to comfort the conscience and strengthen our faith. Second, it bonds all believers together: we share the common bread, the body of Christ. We share together one God, one Word, one Baptism, and “all the grace and treasures of Christ in common”. We are also called to share as one body our external life together with other members of that body.

The Ministry of Preaching

Luther regards preaching as “the chief work that Christ and all the apostles performed and commanded us to do” and divides church government into two parts: the preaching of the Word and the fulfillment of duties according to the teachings of the Word. In teaching further about the church offices, he affirms first of all that ministers and congregants are together

---

763 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 401.
764 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 30.
765 Ibid., 39–40.
766 Ibid., 40.
767 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 238.
768 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 7, 324–5.
responsible for ensuring that all doctrine conforms to the clear teaching of the Word of God. This includes doctrines that Christ himself commanded or affirmed as well as those given by “primitive fathers, prophets and apostles” as recorded in the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{769} Second, he insists that the efficacy of the office is due to God’s power and work, not the human agent performing the duties of the office. As long as the believer performs the duties of the office faithfully according to God’s command, God ensures its efficacy irrespective of who is performing the act.\textsuperscript{770}

It is through the preaching of the Gospel that God rules people, says Luther. Through the Gospel God reveals to people their sinnership and awakens them to the fact of their certain and utter ruin. In this way God constrains them and brings them to a desire for grace and salvation. The Gospel then offers the salvation of Christ to all and claims the obedience of all believers. The role of the Christian minister, who is given the power and authority to preach, is to inculcate God’s Word. This power and authority, which was first given to the apostles, is the power and authority to preach in the spiritual kingdom; they are ordinary people despised by the world, but Christ has given them authority to preach and assurance of the efficacy of their preaching. In the first Postil on 1 Corinthians 4:1–5, Luther explains that the preaching office is a Christ-ordained office; it proceeds “from Christ to us”. Therefore, to fulfill this office is to serve Christ.\textsuperscript{771}

Luther is emphatic in his Postils that Christ comes to us through the preaching office, which is his rule upon earth and imparts to us the effective power of his shed blood. Luther is equally adamant that the Holy Spirit is not found except through his external office: the Word. God could work inwardly by the Holy Spirit without the use of the Word, but chose the Word as

\textsuperscript{769} Ibid., 325.
\textsuperscript{770} Ibid., 327.
\textsuperscript{771} Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 66.
his instrument and human preachers as fellow workers to achieve his purpose.\textsuperscript{772} In the third 
Postil for Pentecost Luther maintains that the Holy Spirit does not work without or before the 
Word; rather, the Holy Spirit comes “with and through the Word and goes no farther than the 
Word goes”. The Word is spoken, and the Spirit works through it.\textsuperscript{773} When we are in danger or 
need, for example, the Holy Spirit comforts us by bringing to mind the promises of the Word we 
have heard.\textsuperscript{774} Furthermore, God has chosen human preachers as fellow workers to advance the 
Gospel. Christ’s Great Commission to his disciples, to reach the ends of the earth, is audacious: 
he claims nothing less than the whole world for himself. The world is incredulous of this 
claim.\textsuperscript{775} But this commission is not to be completed by the apostles’ own power, for they are 
powerless and weak; rather, Christ’s commission carries with it its own authority and strength, 
and together with the Holy Spirit enables the apostles to preach boldly to all kingdoms.\textsuperscript{776}

Even though the words used in preaching come from a human being, as long as that 
person preaches God’s Word it is God himself who speaks directly to the hearer. To believe the 
preacher’s words is thus to believe God.\textsuperscript{777} The Holy Spirit working through the preacher brings 
Christ and the Gospel to the hearer, bestowing faith through the Word and allowing the hearer to 
appropriate the Word by faith.\textsuperscript{778} While the preaching office belongs properly to Christ alone, 
Christ appoints human preachers and exercises the office through them; the office comprises “the 
whole preaching of the Gospel, wherever, whenever, and by whomsoever it is done”.\textsuperscript{779} The 
proclamation of the Word originates with Christ, who first proclaimed the Gospel and

\textsuperscript{772} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 134. 
\textsuperscript{773} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 329. 
\textsuperscript{774} Ibid., 330. 
\textsuperscript{775} Ibid., 214. 
\textsuperscript{776} Ibid., 215. 
\textsuperscript{777} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 239. 
\textsuperscript{778} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 245. 
\textsuperscript{779} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 51.
subsequently instilled it “in the hearts of the apostles and their successors so that they understood it, and into their mouths so that they spoke and declared it”.\footnote{Ibid., 20.} For this reason the ministry of the Word does not depend on the person who preaches it; so long as the Word is preached in its purity, the office is properly exercised.\footnote{Ibid., 238–9.} After all, the power of the Gospel is a divine power and advances throughout the centuries in its unique efficacy, its militancy authenticating its divine origin. Both the Word and the work of the Word testify to Christ’s authority before all creatures.\footnote{Ibid., 216–7.}

Christ is the Shepherd, and he feeds his sheep with the Word. He also instructs ministers to feed the sheep. Ministers ought to feed the sheep with the pure Gospel. Luther insists that preaching which does not offer the Gospel is like poison and brings only death to the sheep.\footnote{Ibid., 18.} In the \textit{Postil} on John 10:11–16, Luther asserts that preachers are the “mouthpieces and instruments of Christ”,\footnote{Ibid., 20.} elsewhere referring to those who preach Christ and only Christ as “true shepherds” and the “mouth of Christ”.\footnote{Ibid., 60–61.} As long as the Gospel is preached, Luther exhorts preachers to preach with confidence that “what [they] teach and preach is truly the Word of God”.\footnote{Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 227.} This being the case, preachers ought not to despise the preaching office; since God has ordained humans as his agents in disseminating his Word, preachers are “fellow workers with God”. Luther even exhorts believers not to despise “inferior preaching”, since we know not “when the hour may come wherein God will, through preachers, perform his work” in us. In other words, as long as the Word of God is preached, God may make use of the worst sermon to deliver his
message. Though human preachers are flawed, their voices are nevertheless equivalent to the voice of Christ when preaching the true Word, the Gospel. Luther often quotes the text from Luke 10:16 of Christ’s saying, “He that hears you hears me; and he that rejects you rejects me.” Whenever we hear the messenger of Christ, we hear Christ himself.

The preacher’s identity as the messenger of Christ, and his authority in preaching, are operative only when the Word of God is proclaimed. Preachers are instruments of Christ when and only when they proclaim the Word of God, maintains Luther; if they do not preach the Word and instead preach their own wisdom, they have “lost their power and their office is gone”. Again, Luther maintains that if the preaching fails to preach Christ, it is not of the Holy Spirit, in which case congregations are not obligated to submit to their teachers. He therefore admonishes preachers not to teach anything out of their own wisdom; it must be God’s work from start to finish: “He puts into our heart and mouth what we should say, and impresses it upon your heart through the Holy Spirit.”

The Function of the Preached Word

In the second Postil on James 1:16–21, Luther notes that the spoken Word is ascribed the power to save souls; indeed, God has sent the Word so that we can appropriate Christ and salvation through it. Luther insists that “there is no other means by which a person is born anew and enters the kingdom of God” than through preaching. In the Postil on 2 Corinthians 3:4–11 he likens the heart to a sheet on which the preached Word writes, whereupon the heart is “to

---

787 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 134.
789 Luther, Sermons, vol. 8, 206.
790 Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 38.
791 Luther, Sermons, vol. 8, 229.
792 Luther, Sermons, vol. 7, 299.
793 Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 433.
receive and securely keep the Word”. The Holy Spirit works through the preached Word to
inscribe the living Christ in the hearts of believers.\textsuperscript{794}

Luther also asserts that preaching is both revelation and proclamation.\textsuperscript{795} Christ is God’s
revelation, embodied in the message of the Gospel; he is the sum of all Divine Doctrine.\textsuperscript{796} The
Gospel itself authenticates the Word of preaching and the sacraments as God’s instrument.\textsuperscript{797}
Those who believe the preached Gospel shall be saved. Preaching is also a proclamation
instructing the Christian to forsake the old self and lead a righteous life.\textsuperscript{798} The Christian is to
busy herself with God’s Word, says Luther, comparing our relationship to God with that of a
married couple: failing to read and study God’s Word is like a person not being together with his
or her spouse. Their relationship cannot be good, and neither can our relationship with God if we
do not spend time with God’s Word. In that case we cannot be called “spiritual”,\textsuperscript{799} and will not
be able to shed our old self and put on our new self.

Furthermore, preaching is the means by which ministers uphold the unity of the Spirit.
Luther maintains that since the Holy Spirit is the one who teaches true knowledge and bestows
faith in Christ, “unity of the Spirit” implies a unity of faith and doctrine.\textsuperscript{800} He scolds the
theologians of glory for the “stirring up of doctrinal discord and division”, which he calls one of
the “wickedest offenses possible”, a sin that reflects their haughtiness, conceit, and self-
seeking;\textsuperscript{801} theologians of the cross, by contrast, are careful “to give no occasion for division or
discord”. Luther acknowledges that the devil is always at work to sow discord among Christians.

\textsuperscript{794} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 226.
\textsuperscript{795} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 114.
\textsuperscript{796} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 7.
\textsuperscript{797} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 239.
\textsuperscript{798} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 114.
\textsuperscript{799} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 239.
\textsuperscript{800} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 288–9.
\textsuperscript{801} Ibid., 289.
Christians must therefore be willing to endure “suffering, letting go of honor, property, physical welfare or life itself” in order to preserve the unity of the Spirit.\(^{802}\) Unity does not mean uniformity, however; Luther explains that unity is not defined by outward similarities in the “form of government, likeness of Law, tradition and ecclesiastical customs”. It is rather represented by the “one plain, pure Gospel doctrine, and an outward confession thereof”, despite other dissimilarity of ordinances and ceremonies.\(^{803}\) Therefore, insists Luther, the chief concern of the Church is to preserve the pure doctrine through faithful preaching of the Word.\(^{804}\)

**The Content of Preaching**

Luther asserts that the duties of ministers are to comfort believers’ consciences, feed them with the Gospel, bear with the weak, heal the sick, teach the Word properly, and serve each according to his needs.\(^{805}\) Of these, preaching is the chief duty.

Luther lists three elements of an evangelical sermon: the command of Christ, the example of the apostles, and corresponding references from the Old Testament.\(^{806}\) Since faith alone grasps Christ, Luther insists that Scripture is not truly preached if faith in Christ is left out.\(^{807}\) For Luther, Christ and the Gospel can be found in both the Older Testament and the Newer Testament: pointing to the apostles, he maintains that their preaching, which is the New Testament, is a presentation of the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament thus directs us to the Old.\(^{808}\) In fact, declares Luther, the Old Testament contains all that is necessary to understand Christ and the Gospels, and more faithful preachers are needed who can “draw forth the living Word from the old Scriptures and make it plain and simple to the people”. The Old

---

\(^{802}\) Ibid., 290.
\(^{803}\) Ibid., 290–1.
\(^{804}\) Ibid., 344.
\(^{805}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 31.
\(^{806}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 55.
\(^{807}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 241.
\(^{808}\) Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 371–2.
Testament is likened to the star that testifies of Christ’s birth. In the Old Testament, the oral tradition precedes the written tradition and is the basis of the written; therefore, the Old Testament is the basis of the New Testament, which began with the oral exposition of the Old.

Luther further divides preaching into two parts: the teaching of doctrine on the one hand, and exhortation to action on the other. Doctrines not generally known to the congregation must first be preached, after which exhortations are necessary to incite and urge action. True preaching, says Luther, should both impart knowledge of sin and comfort the conscience by offering the grace and forgiveness of Christ. In other words, the Law and the Gospel must both be preached: first the Law in order to make sin known, and then Christ and the Gospel to help the sinner “regain cheer for the heart so hopelessly troubled and crushed by the Law”. Preaching the Law without leading the hearer to Christ is ultimately ineffective; Luther maintains that without Christ it “cannot serve in distress, when the devil opens the jaws of hell”. The Law without the Gospel only leads the sinner to conclude that he must try and do better. This only drives the sinner deeper into his unbelief. Luther insists that where the devil “does not find Christ, he has won the game”.

Luther also insists that “all preaching must be adapted to the capacity of the hearers.” He understands that different people of different age groups, from different backgrounds and with differing levels of education, receive the Gospel differently. While God can enable each hearer to hear his voice regardless of the human preacher, the human preacher nevertheless has a responsibility to recognize these differences and preach accordingly.

---

809 Ibid., 372.
810 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 9.
811 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 54.
813 Ibid., 53–4.
814 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 88.
Preachers should use the sermon to admonish believers and “secure voluntary renunciation of their old, sinful, Adam-like nature”. Luther rejects the use of “the restraints of law” to compel an unwilling renunciation; any preacher who uses the Law to force a response he calls a “worldly jailer” rather than a Christian preacher. At the same time, he insists that a person who “will not cheerfully respond to friendly admonition” is not a real Christian.\footnote{Luther, Sermons. 7, 11.} Luther warns those who do not respond to preaching that the preaching of the Gospel is not an “eternal, continuous and permanent mode of instruction” but only a “passing shower”, which when it has passed may not return again. Those who are offered the grace of God’s Word should therefore hold it precious and respond accordingly; otherwise, they will have cause for lament when this grace comes no more.

Indeed, Luther insists that those who are ungrateful for the opportunity to hear the Word preached are unworthy of it and merit the loss of the Word.\footnote{Ibid., 134–5.} God is offended by those who despise the Word, which is so dear and precious to God that “it cost him the blood of his own dear Son”. If we despise his Word, God will send us the severest calamities as punishment.\footnote{Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 250.} There are two ways of preaching against those who despise God’s Word, declares Luther. One way is to preach by threats; Christ on occasion also threatens those who refuse to believe. But the better method is more characteristic of the Lord: he “melts in love and compassion over his enemies”, and warns them “with great heart-rending pity and cries” that he is here to save them from certain ruin.\footnote{Ibid., 317.} It is the duty of ministers to lead the poor consciences of all to God by preaching, by leading a godly life, and by intercessory prayer.\footnote{Ibid., 379.}
The Effectiveness of Preaching

The spiritual Kingdom of Christ is ruled by the Word, not by the sword; Luther always insists that the civil sword is not appropriate for the spiritual kingdom. The sword is retained and used in order to maintain order and keep wicked people in check in the kingdom of the world, but it “cannot force the heart and bring it to faith”.\textsuperscript{820} Luther maintains that no one should be forced to believe.\textsuperscript{821} Coercion is not the way of Christ, who invites and attracts with the Word. Luther writes, “He would let the Word go forth and accomplish all. When their hearts are taken captive, then they will surely come of themselves.”\textsuperscript{822} Though human preachers cannot guarantee the effectiveness of their activity, Luther maintains that Christ has appointed public preaching to bring forth fruit in the hearers.\textsuperscript{823}

Luther maintains that Word and faith are inseparable: without faith, the preached Word cannot be appropriated and preaching will fall fruitless. True saving faith does not doubt that we are God’s children through the saving grace of Christ.\textsuperscript{824} Yet faith originates with the Word, which is accompanied by the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{825} Luther insists that the Word preached is empowered by the Holy Spirit,\textsuperscript{826} and that faith is generated in the hearers by the Spirit. In the first Postil on 1 John 5:4–12, Luther describes the faith that apprehends God in Christ and appropriates him as Saviour as “an invincible power wrought in the hearts of Christians by the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{827} It is this power that enables the sheep to recognize the voice of the Shepherd.\textsuperscript{828}

\textsuperscript{820}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 381.
\textsuperscript{821}Ibid., 380.
\textsuperscript{822}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{823}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 114.
\textsuperscript{824}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 246.
\textsuperscript{825}Ibid., 241.
\textsuperscript{826}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 440.
\textsuperscript{827}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 240.
\textsuperscript{828}Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 378.
Regarding Preachers

Since preachers are the instruments and mouth of Christ and preaching is essential to the Church, Luther has high demands for preachers. Those who preach in order to gain popularity, profit, or advantage are not true shepherds but merely hired hands who will deny the Word when persecution arises.\(^{829}\) Luther cites as example the people who are “running and racing after the best bishoprics”, seeking land and money rather than the opportunity to serve Christ.\(^{830}\) The preacher must not be a flatterer, or a person who lives for the praise of the world; since the Gospel is an offence to the world, its proclamation will only invite opposition, ridicule, and persecution.\(^{831}\) Luther exhorts preachers not to preach “what the people will gladly hear” in order to gain approval and obtain financial favours; rather, they should seek to preach God’s Word faithfully.\(^{832}\) The Gospel alone ministers the power to save, insists Luther; hence faithful preachers must preach only the Gospel.\(^{833}\) The Gospel is the message of how sinners may be reconciled to God, and does not concern itself with “worldly institutions, worldly authority or earthly riches”.\(^{834}\)

Reason and human wisdom are not marks of the Church;\(^{835}\) true preachers must therefore preach nothing but Christ, says Luther.\(^{836}\) He rejects all additions to or deviations from the true doctrine in preaching,\(^{837}\) adding that preachers should refrain from using the pulpit to trumpet their own interests or ideas. Moreover, since they are not lords or masters, they should not seek the obedience and allegiance of the congregation; as messengers of Christ they have the duty to

---

829 Ibid., 29.
830 Ibid., 3, 34.
831 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 46–7.
832 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 214.
833 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 217.
834 Ibid.
835 Ibid., 365.
836 Ibid., 376.
837 Ibid., 376.
preach the Word and lead people to Christ, therein fostering obedience to their Lord.\textsuperscript{838} That is what true preaching does: by making known the Gospel it leads people to Christ, not towards the preacher.\textsuperscript{839} Similarly it is not the preacher, whom the congregation should receive or follow, but Christ himself, and his commandments.\textsuperscript{840}

Luther insists that Christ and the Gospel concerning him are the mystery of God, “far beyond the grasp of our reason and our physical sense”. This mystery is hidden to the world and can be apprehended only by faith; natural reason cannot perceive nor acknowledge Christ as the Saviour and Lord of all creatures, nor does it accept the Scriptural testimony to Christ. Moreover, this faith comes by hearing – i.e., hearing with the Spirit-prepared heart: Luther notes that “none can apprehend these truths except he hears and believes them through the Gospel.” Plainly, therefore, while faith is always essential to appropriating Christ, in Luther’s view the hearing of the Gospel and not mere reading of the Scriptures is primordially necessary.\textsuperscript{841} Christ desires the entire world to hear the Gospel and to learn the true doctrine of salvation. However, worldly wisdom is “blind concerning these things”.\textsuperscript{842} Luther insists that nothing can be taught without faith. Those who do not have faith “cannot judge of any doctrine correctly, for here the carnal minded who are smart and worldly wise are incompetent, [and] only pious spiritual hearts” are able to discern true doctrine.\textsuperscript{843} Luther cites the example of the Jews of Christ’s time: in their worldly wisdom they eagerly wait for the Messiah to come and restore Jerusalem, the Temple, and all Israel to its former glory, yet that is not the Gospel. The true Gospel is that all who

\textsuperscript{838} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 66.
\textsuperscript{839} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 203–4.
\textsuperscript{840} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 6, 67.
\textsuperscript{841} Ibid, 70–1. Luther calls the Church the “mouth-house”, not the “pen-house” on account of the fact that the Word is oral in nature. It was transmitted orally before it was written down.
\textsuperscript{842} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 217.
\textsuperscript{843} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 274.
believe shall be saved. Faith must precede understanding; Luther instructs those who want to learn the way that they “must believe and receive the Word, and let go of [their] notions which undertake to comprehend and encompass matters that no reason can understand nor attain unto”. 

Since the world’s understanding is in such stark dissonance with the Gospel, the preaching of the Gospel always invites opposition, and preachers and servants can always expect to suffer poverty and persecution because of it. In the eyes of the world the Church does not have “the appearance of a prosperous and well ordered organization” but is like a collection of miserable orphans “without leader, protection or help upon earth”; it is ridiculed by the world, and its claim to be the people of God is deemed foolish. If anyone clings to the true Word of God, the world “will rise to oppose” that person. In addition, the devil himself joins the attack: the devil will “labour to tear you from it”, warns Luther, and will use our own reason and wisdom to make us doubt God’s Word. Yet Christians should not fear either the world or the devil, for God allows these persecutions in order to test our faith so that we do not remain “lazy, sleepy or idle”. The Holy Spirit will instil God’s wisdom in us, so that we may know that his wisdom and strength is wiser and stronger than the power of this world.

Luther warns of the coming of false preachers, reminding believers that “it has come to pass in all periods of the world’s history that after faithful and true ministers, prophets, and rulers of God’s people labored, others followed who corrupted the pure doctrine, faith and worship.” Faithful preachers should therefore beware of false prophets lurking in the shadows.

---

844 Luther, Sermons, vol. 3, 220.
845 Ibid., 445.
846 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 212.
848 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 248–9.
849 Ibid., 266.
same time Luther comforts those who lament the corrupting of true doctrine, assuring them that “God’s Word will continue always pure and unadulterated.” Why does God allow false prophets to lead the flock astray? Does God lack the necessary power? Does he fail to recognize the false teachers? No; God allows false prophets to exist “in order to prove and preserve his own people, and to punish the unthankful”, Luther says, and thereby God tries to teach Christians how to discern false preachers. For one thing, false preachers are always without calling: they come of their own “self-call”. Also, a characteristic of all sectarians is that they exalt their own works above God’s Word. The works and life and Word-denying doctrine of false teachers do not conform to God’s works.

Preaching the Word of God is the test for the faithfulness of ministers. Luther detests preachers who do not preach the true Gospel, and declares them worse sinners than brothel owners: while everyone acknowledges that running a brothel is sinful, many are deceived by clerical robes and led astray by preachers who teach another gospel, a non-gospel. For example, Luther denounces the Papists for destroying not only faith but also love by their false preaching. By teaching good works rather than faith, they lead the flock to abandon faith in Christ and rely on their own works—one of which is supposedly to use their resources to endow the Church. This leads many to neglect the love of a neighbour in need so as to contribute to the Church instead, in the false belief that this contribution earns merit before God.

---

850 Ibid., 266.
851 Ibid., 267.
852 Ibid., 271.
853 Ibid., 281.
854 Ibid.
855 Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 74.
856 Ibid., 200.
857 Ibid.
Luther exhorts the church to compensate ministers and preachers adequately so that they are not tempted to “forsake their office and seek their bread through other occupations”. On the other hand, Luther criticizes those who shun the ministry on account of the prospect of poverty. They should have faith that Christ will “give them their daily bread or nourishment for their bodies”. Luther exhorts them to lift their eyes to see how God blesses them in exceptional ways; these extraordinary provisions are a greater treasure exceeding all the riches of the world.

Luther affirms the authority of the laity to preach. He holds up the example of Stephen in the book of Acts, who preaches the Word of God in the market despite the fact that he is not one of the apostles. At the same time Luther carefully distinguishes the authority to preach for the everyday Christian from the preaching office granted to those appointed as preachers, noting that Stephen attends faithfully to his own office as a deacon and “is readily silent where it is the place of the apostles to preach”. While Luther affirms that all Christians have authority to preach as long as the pure Word is preached in God’s name (no one has authority to preach anything else), he maintains that the church requires order, citing Paul’s insistence on order in 1 Corinthians. A preacher is to be selected “by common consent”, for though it is the Word and not the preacher that is the essential element of the preaching office, “no one should step into the office and preach from his own presumption…without a commission from those having the authority.”

---

859 Ibid., 216–7.
860 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 207.
862 Ibid., 374.
but Luther insists that it is nonetheless “a call of love” and should not be despised, as we “owe it to each other to love our neighbor”: when the congregation or the government needs our assistance and asks us to help, we are duty bound to help them.  

Luther exhorts preachers to preach faithfully and leave the results to Christ. Even when the true Word is preached faithfully, not every hearer will accept God’s Word. Luther expresses his astonishment and dismay at the fact that most people, even those who appear to be of “excellent hearts”, so readily welcome the heretic but are hostile to true preachers. Some preachers are so frustrated that they seek ways to determine who truly believes, but Luther warns them not to “seek to know how each one may believe, or who accepts the Word and who does not”. If we insist on preaching only to those who would respond positively to the Word, then we “would never dare to preach at all”. At the same time, Luther insists that every congregation is responsible for carefully discerning the teachings of the preacher.

Luther similarly criticizes those ministers who insist on ascertaining the faith of the person before preaching or administering baptism. He maintains that since no one can look into the heart of another, it is impossible for us to judge whether someone truly believes or not. Therefore, he admonishes the minister, “you must not wait until you are sure as to who believes and who does not.” We must preach faithfully and trust that God’s Word will not be unfruitful.

Lastly, Luther exhorts the preacher to live an exemplary life. Luther paraphrases Tauler, stating that “the experienced Christian is able to judge and to teach the world.” First-hand Christian experience enhances the message of the preacher: “Faith helps him to a right

---

863 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 253.
864 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 4, 387.
866 Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 170.
understanding of all things, and conflict gives him the personal experience which brings perfect assurance. Therefore, he may speak with the utmost confidence and may instruct all men.”

Confession

An extension of the Word preached is the declaration of the forgiveness of sins in response to private confession. While Luther criticizes Papist practices such as the Mass and penance, he does not forbid confession. In fact, he says, confession can be heard by any Christian so long as forgiveness by Christ is preached. As long as the Christian has sincere confidence in the grace of Christ, which he has promised to all who desire it, then her sins are certainly forgiven. Luther maintains that confession is not an end unto itself, and certainly does not earn merit before God; its purpose is rather to reaffirm God’s promises of forgiveness and to allow the believer to have a free conscience in order to love the neighbour freely. In the first Postil on Matthew 9:1–8, Luther explains the two kinds of forgiveness. The first is the forgiveness that God alone can effect, which is to “drive sin from the heart and infuse grace into it”. The second is the declaration of the forgiveness of sin. Luther maintains that all Christians have the power to declare forgiveness of sins in this sense – i.e., pronounce absolution in the name of Christ.

Proper Worship

For Luther, the Word of God is the highest authority for explicating ministries of the Church. Where there are explicit commands in Scripture, we must obey; where there is no explicit command or prohibition in Scripture, Christians are at liberty to decide whether to do or refrain from doing. In the case of the worship of God, Luther is adamant that Scripture has

---

867 Luther, Sermons, vol. 6, 221.
868 Luther, Sermons, vol. 1, 404–5.
869 Ibid., 405.
870 Ibid., 405–6.
871 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 208–9.
published clear commands to which obedience is the only true worship of God. God requires nothing else from us, nor does he value other worship. This worship is common to all. There is no special class of persons who can offer a different or better worship.\textsuperscript{872}

In the \textit{Postil} for Epiphany, Luther maintains that “the worship of God is nowhere established, except in his commandments.” Whoever keeps these commandments serves and worships God.\textsuperscript{873} In this \textit{Postil} Luther goes through the Ten Commandments pointing out how each is an act of worship. Obedience to the first commandment, he insists, is the true worship of God. The first commandment teaches Christians to “confess, honor and love God with your whole heart, put all your trust and confidence in him, never doubt his goodness, either in life or in death, either in sins or in right living”. This is the essence of worship.\textsuperscript{874} Moreover, we cannot attain to it by our own efforts; no one is able to obey this command perfectly except Jesus, and we can only fulfil it vicariously through him. As we cling to Christ in faith, this commandment is “fulfilled by us through the precious blood of Christ”.\textsuperscript{875} The second act of worship is to honour God’s name, calling upon it when in need and confessing it before the world.\textsuperscript{876} The third is to bear the cross of suffering for the sake of faith and confession. These first three acts, or what Luther calls articles of worship—faith, confession, and suffering—correspond to the first three commandments of the Decalogue.\textsuperscript{877}

Luther continues from the fourth to the tenth act of worship:

\begin{quote}
Fourthly, we come into the second table, and henceforth you serve God, if you honor father and mother, are subject and obedient to them, and help them where they need it before all mankind, and if you do not without
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[872] Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 414.
\item[873] Ibid., 412–3.
\item[874] In the \textit{Small Catechism}, Luther explains that the essence of the First Command is that “we should fear, love, and trust God above all things.”
\item[875] Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 413.
\item[876] Ibid.
\item[877] Ibid., 413–4.
\end{footnotes}
their consent, go into orders, when they are in need of your services in some other way.

Fifthly, that you injure no one in body, but show kindness to everyone, even to your enemies, that you visit the sick and prisoners, and give a helping hand to all needy, and have a good, kind heart for all men.

Sixthly, that you live chastely and temperately, or always honor your marriage vow, and help others to honor theirs.

Seventhly, that you do not deceive or injure anyone, or take advantage in business; but that you lend and give to everyone or exchange with him, as far as you can, and protect your neighbor against injury.

Eighthly, that you guard your tongue, and injure, slander, or bel lie no one, but defend, excuse and spare everyone.

Ninthly and tenthly, that you do not covet any man’s wife or property.\textsuperscript{878}

This list is parallel to what the \textit{Small Catechism} teaches regarding the Ten Commandments. As is his custom, Luther combines the first two commands, you shall have no other gods and you shall not make idols, into the first. He then splits the tenth command, you shall not covet your neighbour’s house or wife, into the ninth and tenth.

Luther’s teaching here is another illustration of his emphasis on “first-commandment righteousness”. In the \textit{Small Catechism} the explanation for the first commandment is that “we should fear, love, and trust God above all things.”\textsuperscript{879} Then the explanations for all subsequent commandments begin with the preface: “We should fear and love God, that we may…” Plainly, the first commandment is the basis of all the other nine. Obedience to them presupposes our obedience to the first, and obedience to the first means obedience to all the others. Moreover, since they are all of a piece, breaking the last (or least) commandment means breaking all of them. Luther also includes the preface to the Decalogue in the first commandment: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” This introductory statement means that the first commandment is first and foremost the Gospel: God has acted to save us, and now gives the commandments as a gift. The Ten Commandments are therefore not a

\textsuperscript{878} Ibid., 414.
\textsuperscript{879} Timothy Lull editor., \textit{Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings}. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 476.
moral code that we follow in order to earn merit before God, and cannot be fulfilled by works. In
the Postils Luther maintains that Christ alone embodies the commandments, fulfilling the Law
perfectly;\textsuperscript{880} we can fulfil it only by faith in him – i.e., absent faith, the Commandment is
violated even if one refrains from lying, stealing, etc. Luther asserts that “the worship of God
consists in this, that you confess, honor and love God with your whole heart, put all your trust
and confidence in him, never doubt his goodness, either in life or in death, either in sins or in
right living, as the first commandment teaches.”\textsuperscript{881} By faith in Christ we confess, honour, and
love God with all our heart. This is first-commandment righteousness and the true worship of
God.

\textbf{Ethics in the Temporal Kingdom}

Now let us turn our attention toward the temporal kingdom. What is the ethics of the cross
for a Christian or a community of Christians in the temporal kingdom? Luther insists that each
person occupies a God-appointed vocation or station. Our ethical duties in the temporal kingdom
are exercised through each person’s various stations in life.

\textbf{Christian Vocation}

Gustaf Wingren’s seminal research on Luther and vocation points out that Luther’s
understanding of \textit{Beruf} ties personal calling or vocation to station in life. Luther maintains that
“stations” are instituted by God on earth.\textsuperscript{882} These stations are designed by God for the benefit of
others. Marriage is an example of such a station: the very nature of marriage “compels the

\textsuperscript{880} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 238.
\textsuperscript{881} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 413.
\textsuperscript{882} Gustaf Wingren, \textit{Luther on Vocation} (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 5.
husband’s selfish desires to yield and likewise inhibits the egocentricity of the wife’s heart”. The marriage station itself compels self-giving to spouse and children.

Ethical living, therefore, is a matter of occupying the appropriate station and office. A rightful station instituted by God will enable a sinful person to serve the well-being of others. “Even persons who have not taken the gospel to their hearts serve God’s mission, though they be unaware thereof, by the very fact that they perform the outer functions of their respective stations.”883 This is God’s design. On the other hand, a righteous person occupying a sinful office will only bring destruction. The question, then, is whether one’s station is a legitimate one or a sinful one.

This view of ethical living is also reflected in the Postils. In the Postil for the Day of St. John the Evangelist, Luther maintains that one’s station is one’s calling. These states or stations include one’s familial relations, marital relations, work, and all the different roles one has in life. If you are a husband, then your calling is to be a good husband. Be a good husband and faithfully take care of your wife and children, life and property, so that “all may be obedient to God.” If you are a son, then be a loving son to your parents. If you are a worker, serve your employer faithfully, and if you own a business, treat your workers with kindness. Every sphere of life is a calling from God to serve our neighbours with love.884 Indeed, Luther claims that even Christ has his specific calling and office.885

Luther makes a distinction between the private citizen and the office holder, explaining that an office “is ordained to punish sin; not to tolerate wrong, but protect the right”: the office holder not only has the right to punish wrong, but is required to do so by his office. This

883 Ibid., 6–7.
884 Luther, Sermons, vol. 1, 242.
885 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 212.
authority, in other words, is conferred on him not by virtue of his personality but by virtue of the power vested in the office.\textsuperscript{886} Thus the official can exact punishment only in his capacity as the office holder; as a private citizen (i.e., as a Christian) he must resort only to love and the Word, not power and might.\textsuperscript{887} If it is asked whether this conflicts with the ethic of mercy and love, Luther insists that just punishment by ordained civil offices is not opposed to mercy and therefore not properly interfered with by mercy: rebuking sin and punishing evil practices is in fact a part of love and mercy.\textsuperscript{888}

In the first \textit{Postil} on 1 Peter 4, Luther exhorts believers to serve faithfully in their respective stations in life, for this is how they are called to serve the neighbour.\textsuperscript{889} He insists that “there is no work nobler than being obedient to the particular calling and work assigned of God.” In the \textit{Postil} for Epiphany, Luther again distinguishes between the office and the office holder: all offices, regardless of what kind of person fills them, are God-appointed and their functions serve the people and are pleasing to God, so that even evil people who love neither God nor neighbour unwittingly serve the people when they perform the duties of their office. He uses the example of Caiaphas the high priest, who denies Christ yet is still given prophecies to utter. Luther maintains that these prophecies are uttered by Caiaphas by virtue of his office as the high priest.\textsuperscript{890}

The objective in performing ethical deeds belonging to one’s earthly station is always to serve the neighbour, not to secure one’s own justification. Vocation belongs on earth, not in heaven; it is directed towards one’s neighbour, not towards God.\textsuperscript{891} Vocation and good works

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{886} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 127.
\textsuperscript{887} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 119.
\textsuperscript{888} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 8, 126–7.
\textsuperscript{889} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 278.
\textsuperscript{890} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 359.
\textsuperscript{891} Wingren, \textit{Luther on Vocation}, 10.
\end{flushleft}
cannot contribute to our status before God, reduce our sins, or make us righteous before God. Vocation exists on earth strictly for the good of our neighbours.\textsuperscript{892} Our sins are forgiven in heaven, through the gospel of Christ, making us wholly justified \textit{coram Deo}. “The sin of the person himself is judged and forgiven in heaven, where there is no question of station, office and vocation, but only about the heart. On earth, on the other hand, one must give thought to office and station, not to the sin of the heart.”

On earth and in relation to the neighbour one fills an office through which the neighbour is loved. God uses these offices to maintain order on earth. Works seemingly contrary to Christian love are performed by these offices to maintain order. For example, one human being is not allowed to take the life of another; rather, she is exhort to “turn the other cheek”. However, in the office of judge and executioner she must uphold the law and execute the evil person. It is not hypocrisy for one to resist evil through the office of judge, executioner, or soldier while professing love as a private Christian. “The paradox rests with God: it is he who forcibly resists evil through the offices of judge and executioner, and commands all persons not to resist evil as individuals, even though they be judges and executioners.”\textsuperscript{893} So each person is both an individual naked before God and, at the same time, a holder of an office or station on earth. When he turns to God he is but a single person like any other; when he turns towards the earth and his neighbours, he is an emperor, judge, teacher, father, brother, or son.\textsuperscript{894}

The theologians of glory misuse their offices for their own glory and benefit, says Luther, while the theologian of the cross faithfully serves the neighbour without regard for self.\textsuperscript{895}

Believers are to do the work of their stations faithfully without regard to its significance, because

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{892} Ibid.
\bibitem{893} Ibid, 8.
\bibitem{894} Ibid, 12.
\bibitem{895} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 278–9.
\end{thebibliography}
that is their calling and a means of serving their neighbour. We must “close our eyes, not look at our works, whether they be great, small, honorable, contemptible, spiritual, temporal or what kind of an appearance and name they may have upon earth; but look to the command and to the obedience in the works.”\textsuperscript{896} The theologian of glory is self-centred and self-important, thinking highly of herself and her abilities on the grounds that, of all the people in the world, God will surely choose the most capable to hold office. The theologian of the cross, on the other hand, always considers herself unworthy. Luther maintains that the self-awareness of the unworthy believer is the beginning of her worthiness; it is because she is aware of her sinfulness that she realizes she must place her faith in God and not in herself.\textsuperscript{897} The theologian of the cross does not set store by her own skill and exertion but relies instead on God’s blessing and grace.\textsuperscript{898}

Luther chastises those who think that certain Christians are favoured by God by virtue of their stations or offices. It is the theologians of glory who like to compare themselves to others in this way, perceiving that their station is above that of others and is more honourable. When looking up at those with “higher” offices, they fume in envy and therefore strive to climb up to these higher positions. Thus the theologian of glory is busy at work not for the benefit of his neighbour but to gain fame and status for himself. Luther insists that in God’s eyes “these conditions make no inner difference.” God’s favour is not to be sought by means of works or earthly stations, for it is only by faith that we are justified before God. The function of our earthly stations is to serve our neighbours.\textsuperscript{899}

Luther exhorts believers dissatisfied with their lot in life not to seek change of external circumstances but to change their spirit of discontent. He maintains that one station is just like

\textsuperscript{896} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 1, 244.
\textsuperscript{897} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 4, 137–8.
\textsuperscript{898} Ibid., 144.
\textsuperscript{899} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 7, 48-9.
another. If we change our station today, we will find the new station just as tiresome after the novelty wears off. Every station in life has its advantages and disadvantages; there are no perfect stations which bring only satisfaction. We must then change our inner spirit and realize that one station is just like another in that all are instituted by God to serve the neighbour. As long as we serve the neighbour faithfully in our appointed stations, we should be satisfied. While our external circumstances facilitate discontent, our inner faith gives us the firm conviction that staying in the God-appointed station is the best arrangement. This faith brings “rest, contentment, peace and banishes the tired spirit”. ⁹⁰⁰ Luther urges the theologians of the cross to “run full speed”, to do willingly the most common and insignificant tasks demanded of their stations because these tasks are commanded by God. ⁹⁰¹ He concludes that the reason Christians are unwilling to do menial work is because the work and the Word are separated. Christians must connect the Word to their work so that they can understand that it is God who has commanded them to do these seemingly trivial tasks. ⁹⁰²

Luther insists that all stations function to serve the needs of the people, so that if an occupation serves no need, one can be sure that it is not a God-appointed station. Luther rejects the monastery on this basis. All stations such as marriage, work, and family serve others. Those office holders serve the need of the people by performing the duties of their office. The monastery, however, serves no one but itself, Luther claims. Monks and nuns withdraw from the world and disregard the needs of the people; therefore, they cannot be occupying a God-appointed station. ⁹⁰³ How can one be certain that one’s present station is God’s calling? Luther

⁹⁰⁰ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 247–8.
⁹⁰¹ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 5, 214.
⁹⁰² Ibid., 214–5.
⁹⁰³ Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 397.
maintains that as long as the present station is not sinful in itself, one is “certainly placed there by God, and in the state that is pleasing to God.”

If all stations in life are concerned only with the needs of others, how can one’s own needs be met? Luther counsels believers not to put faith in material gain like the theologians of glory. They busy themselves with securing earthly possessions and in the process fall into the devil’s snare. For this reason, though they are rich in material possessions, they are spiritually poor. We believers must look only at our current circumstances; we must trust God for our daily bread and not fear that we will starve. In the second Postil on Luke 5, Luther extols the theologian of the cross who is at peace and content with the things God gives him. He is not tempted by greed and is not anxious about where to find food for subsistence. He is content with God’s grace and favour.

Luther insists that Christians should work hard, fulfilling their duties and trusting the results to God. In the gospel account, the Lord commands the fishermen to lower the nets and leave the results to him; similarly, we need not worry about the results of our labour because it belongs to the Lord. The theologians of glory, by contrast, always demand that God perform the work for them while they worry about the results. They resort to usury to hoard money in order to satisfy their perceived needs, but neglect to fulfill their duties in their God-appointed offices. Luther sees Jesus’ calling of the disciples as a lesson for all believers: God demands that we work hard for results just as the disciples must work hard to catch fish, yet at the same time, the results do not depend on our hard work but come from God’s help and blessing.

---

904 Ibid., 248.  
905 Luther, Sermons, vol. 4, 133.  
906 Ibid., 133–4.  
907 Ibid., 150.  
908 Ibid., 135.
Though the results come from God and not from us, we must still work because “he will not give us anything unless we work for it.”

Luther maintains that, sometimes, Christians necessarily suffer poverty because a God-given office or station does not offer riches, and since a Christian is devoted to serving the neighbour through her office, she does not seek extra income from outside it. Christians are despised by the world and cannot depend on it for peace and protection; living always in uncertainty and danger, we can rely only on Christ for daily subsistence. Luther laments that the two extremes of poverty and riches have done great damage to the ministry through the ages. When being in the ministry means certain poverty, everyone shies away from the ministry, and when the ministry brings fame and riches, everyone flock to it in search of those riches rather than out of a desire to serve God through the minister’s office.

Although a Christian who holds a civil office must punish evil in his official capacity, Luther cautions against evil motives. It is an abuse of the office to punish out of anger, hatred, or bitterness; one should punish only in order to administer justice and maintain order. In the Postil on 1 Peter 3, believers are admonished not to return evil for evil, even though as fallen human beings we feel angered and offended by evil and have an urge to mete out retribution. Evil and violence can in no way change the world, Luther insists; the world “will remain as it is, and will continue to hate and persecute the godly and believing”. Repaying evil with evil can only “disturb your own heart with bitterness”. He perceptively points out that the wickedness of human nature is such that retribution is never equal to the injury suffered. The angry person

---

909 Ibid., 151.
910 Ibid., 212.
911 Ibid., 212–3.
912 Ibid., 213.
913 Luther, Sermons, vol. 8, 130.
914 Ibid., 132.
always goes beyond an eye for an eye and spares neither “the neighbor’s honor nor his body and life”. 915

The theologian of the cross, therefore, refrains from retribution and directs her prayers to the Lord. Luther reassures the believer that the Lord “looks upon you with gracious, winning eyes, so also are his ears alert to even the faintest sound. He hears your complaint, your sighing and prayer, and hears, too, willingly and with pleasure; as soon as you open your mouth, your prayer is heard and answered.” 916 Luther exhorts the suffering believer to hold on to God and his blessings, maintaining that the greater the injury and persecution, the greater God’s blessing upon the sufferer. In fact, by their slander and persecution, enemies only “multiply your blessings”. God will mete out just punishment upon the wicked and console the righteous. Believers must therefore resist retribution and persevere with hope in God’s blessings. 917

Recognition of Hypocrisy in this Government

Even though he is a supporter of the temporal government, Luther is by no means naïve about its goodness. He states that “where temporal government or law alone prevails, there sheer hypocrisy is inevitable, even though the commandments be God’s very own.” 918 Hypocrisy is inevitable because without the Holy Spirit no one can be truly righteous no matter how hard he tries. The temporal rulers “know nothing of the spiritual matters of faith,” which is why Luther criticizes them for attempting to interfere with the affairs of the spiritual kingdom. Temporal government neither understands spiritual things nor has the ability to deal with them, yet it

915 Ibid., 134.
916 Ibid., 136.
917 Ibid., 138.
sometimes attempts to control the spiritual kingdom.\textsuperscript{919} On the other hand, Luther affirms that temporal governments are ordained by God. God ordained both the secular and the spiritual kingdoms and governments and is active in both. Their purposes differ but are both God-ordained. Christ did not come to change the temporal kingdom but to preach repentance. His concern is to preach the gospel for the salvation of the world.\textsuperscript{920}

\textbf{The Different Responsibilities of Rulers and Subjects}

Luther’s main treatises during the outbreak of the Peasant War were often misread either by the rebels or by the nobility because they did not understand his important distinction between the responsibilities of the rulers and those of the subjects.

In \textit{Admonition to Peace} Luther sympathizes with the peasants, calling the nobility to reform their ways and accusing them of cheating and robbing the people in order to maintain their extravagant lifestyle. This led many to believe that Luther sided with the cause of the peasants, but to their surprise they found Luther firmly on the side of the rulers in his treatise \textit{Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants}. There, in a seeming about-face that mystified many, including his friends, he openly calls for the sword to fall on the rebel peasants. He then wrote a third treatise, \textit{An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants}, in which he tries to explain the distinction between the responsibilities of rulers and those of their subjects, pointing out that his previous two letters were written to different audiences appealing to them to do their respective duties. The second book, says Luther, was aimed at “what the peasants deserve and how they ought to be punished”, \textsuperscript{921} but this does not mean that the rulers and princes

\textsuperscript{919} Luther, \textit{Sermons}, vol. 3, 223.
\textsuperscript{920} Ibid.
are in the right. In fact, Luther promises that “when I have time and occasion to do so, I shall attack the princes and lords too.”

In his Postils Luther makes the same distinction between the responsibility of the ruler and that of the subject. It is not the case that only the subjects are responsible to their government; rather, the government is also responsible to rule for the benefit of its subjects. Each has its own responsibilities, which Luther exhorts them to fulfil. He criticizes the rulers of the civil government, even though it is established by God and is legitimate in and of itself, because they have misused and even abused their powers. They “rob and take what is not theirs” when they mete out unnecessary assessments and burdens. Luther exhorts the rulers to be responsible in ruling the people and to avoid taking what belongs to the people.

Summary

Luther’s understanding of Christian ethics is bounded by his understanding of the division between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world. The Christian lives in the Kingdom of God through the visible church. The church is governed by God’s Word in love. The two marks of the church, Word and Sacraments, are normative and constitutive to actions within the church. Whenever the Word is preached and the Sacrament administered, Christ is present in the church. Christian ethics in the church therefore consists of participation in the Word and Sacraments. The preacher, while not a higher class of Christian, is God’s chosen vehicle to transmit his Word. Christians can also administer the Word through private conversations as well as confession and absolution in Christian fellowship.

---

922 Ibid.
923 Luther, Sermons, vol. 5, 323.
924 Ibid., 320.
In the Kingdom of the world, the civil government is the God-ordained instrument in
maintaining order and administering justice by the sword. God has appointed each person to
various stations in life: one’s occupation, marriage status, and parental status are all vocations or
stations. Christian ethics is best exercised through the faithful exercising of one’s own vocation.
When the judge judges, teacher teaches, baker bakes, God’s hand is at work through these
vocations for the benefit of the neighbour.
Conclusion

Very early in his public career, in a scholastic debate (Heidelberg Disputation), Luther announced a theology of the cross as the key to Christian theology. The precise vocabulary he used in those debates was not repeated as such in his voluminous later writings. Nevertheless, the theological stance informs his later work, beyond the arena of scholastic debate, into the important work of the proclamation of the Christian life for Christian communities. The previous chapters illustrate that with respect to the Postils.

The thesis contends that Luther considers theologia crucis to be practical and that the theology of the cross is the basis of his ethical teachings in the Postils. It does so by its focus in different chapters on motifs of theologia crucis as the subject of research into Luther’s Postils. The chapter two is on the motifs of the hiddenness of God and the “weak Christ”. Luther insists that the cross is the place where God has chosen to reveal himself; the cross will appear as foolishness to those who hold on to fallen human reason, while it is wisdom and salvation to those who perceive it by faith. The third is devoted to soteriology. Luther’s rejection of works-righteousness and his championing of justification by faith have their starting point at the cross. Chapters four, five, and six explore Luther’s ethics of the cross. The cross reveals the essence of Christian ethics: love. Christ came and died to save the sinner because of love. Therefore, love is the motivation for all works performed by the Christian and these works should be performed toward the neighbour. The last chapter, six, discusses Christian living in both the spiritual kingdom and the temporal kingdom. In the spiritual kingdom which is ruled by Christ, Christians embrace the Word through the marks of the church: Word (preaching) and Sacraments.
While Luther made a valiant attempt to relate all Christian praxis to the cross, he nevertheless seems to fall short in its concrete applications. I offer here some lines of consideration that intitate the seeing shortcoming. In his emphasis on Word and Sacrament nothing is said about the life of the Christian with respect to ethical duties, specifically non-clerical Christians. Hardly any mention is made of the active life of Church fellowship or even the legitimacy of the hierarchical church structures. Another shortcoming is that his view on praxis does not take into consideration a global village and its impact on changing economic conditions that lead to forced retirements and job loss. This may have ramifications for how we love the neighbour, whether we are able to respond to the needs of the neighbor, in terms of social action, or even having time to lend a sympathetic ear, to help cultivate hope that carries us through life’s hardships.

It may be that Luther’s understanding of Christian ethics is guided and bound by his doctrine of the two kingdoms and two governments. Undoubtedly how the doctrine is to be understood has been widely studied and discussed, discussed and studied, and one picture that emerges is that the Christian lives simultaneously in both kingdoms. This is a point that Bonhoeffer makes with respect to Luther’s praxis of the cross, and in my view a corrective to Luther. Clifford Green notes that “Bonhoeffer's Christology is simultaneously incarnational and communal.” The incarnational nature of Bonhoeffer’s theology is a continuation and extension of Luther’s theologia crucis. Bonhoeffer is also known for his theology of sociality. The communal nature of this theology of sociality provides the corrective to Luther’s praxis of the cross.

Further, suffering and the cross is a central topic in Bonhoeffer’s book Discipleship. Christ died on the cross for humankind and his disciples are called to bear their crosses: “When
Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” However, Bonhoeffer’s Christology includes not only the cross but also the incarnation and the resurrection. Christ’s crucifixion presupposes his incarnation and anticipates his resurrection. In fact, an important and related theme of Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics* is the concept of the *Stellvertretung*, a representative who is acting on behalf of the community. Another of his theme is the “ethics in the moment”. Like Luther, Bonhoeffer rejects a moralist theory of the good.

In short, to close, there is scope in my study to develop, or at least to make and explain linkages of *theologia crucis* and a Bonhoeffer-like ethics that stress being in the world and yet not of the world. Thus, there is a way that the *theologia crucis* in the *Postils* may yet be a resource for thinking about Christian living in the context of a post-modern world with its economic shifts and twists.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


_____.


Bastien, P.E. Praying with Martin Luther. Minnesota: Saint Mary’s, 1999.


Begalke, M.V. ‘An Introduction to Luther’s Theology of Pastoral Care’ (Ph.D. dissertation; Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1979).


_____.


_____.


_____.


_____.


Bornkamm, Heinrich. “Die theologischen Thesen Luthers bei der Heidelberger Disputation 1518 und seine theologia Crucis,” in _Luther, Gestalt und Wirkungen, Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte_, vol. 5, no. 188 (Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn) 1975.


_____._Luther’s World of Thought._ Translated by M.H. Bertram. St. Louis: Concordia, 1958.


Boulton, M. “‘We Pray by His Mouth’: Karl Barth, Erving Goffman, and a Theology of Invocation,” _Modern Theology_ 17 (2001): 67-83.


Cubillos, Robert H. “Consolation as theme in Luther's sermons and correspondence: insights into his theological ethics” Asbury journal, 64 no 2 Fall (2009): 36-67.


Jørgensen, Ninna. “‘Sed manet articulus’: preaching and catechetical training in selected sermons by the later Luther’ *Studia theologica,* 59 no 1 (2005): 38-54.


_____. ‘The suffering Church: A Study of Luther’s Theologia Crucis,’ *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 50 (1986): 3-17.


Kosten, Andrew. The Pastoral Element in Luther's Church Postils. Temple University, UMI Dissertations, 1954.


Lage, D. Martin Luther’s Christology and Ethics. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1990.


Mackinnon, J. Luther and the Reformation. vol. 2. London: Longmans, Green, 1928.


_____. “the Righteousness of God” from Augustine to Luther,’ Studia Theologia 36 (1982): 63-78.


Ngien, Dennis. ‘Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond: Luther’s Understanding of the Communicatio Idiomatum,’ *Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004): 54-68.


_____ *Luther as a Spiritual Adviser: The Interface of Theology and Piety in Luther’s Devotional Writings*. UK: Paternoster, 2007.

Noll, M.A. ‘Martin Luther and the Concept of a “True” Church,’ *Evangelical Quarterly* 50 (1978): 79-85.


Owen, B. *Daily Readings from Luther’s Writings*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993.


Pelikan, J. *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer’s Exegetical Writings (Luther’s works, companion Volume)*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1959.


Posset, F. ‘Luther’s Catholic Christology according to His Johannine Lectures of 1527’ (PhD dissertation; Ann Arbor: University Microfilm International, 1984).


Stolt, B. ‘Joy, Love and Trust – Basic Ingredients in Luther’s Theology of the Faith of the Heart,’ Institute for Luther studies at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg Colloquy Lectures (31 October 2001), 1-16.


Voelz, J.W. ‘Luther’s Use of Scripture in the Small Catechism,’ in *Luther’s Catechisms – 450 years: Essays Commemorating the Small and Large Catechisms of Dr. Martin Luther*. Edited by D.P. Scaer and R.D. Preus. Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1979. 55-64.


Wilson, H.S. ‘Luther on Preaching as God Speaking,’ *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005): 63-76.


_____. “Recently discovered notes on two sermons from 1520 by Martin Luther.” *Sixteenth Century Journal,* 14 no 2 Sum (1983): 188-200.


