

Called by the Gospel: Justification and Vocation
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Part One: The Call to Faith

A. Called to Do Nothing

When we talk about vocation we can talk about what one is called to do. Or we can talk about the one who is called to do it. I suspect that most people think first of what one is called to do. After all, that's the whole point of vocation, isn't it? We want to know that what we are doing is what God has called us to. This will bring us satisfaction in doing it. But when we consider Christian vocation we may not begin with what we are called to do. That's because God does not call us to do anything until He calls us to do nothing. It is the call to do nothing that makes us Christians.

Faith is born in the doing of nothing at all. As St. Paul teaches, "To him who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." (Romans 4:5) The one that works for a righteousness that will avail before God commits mortal sin in all his works. Only the ungodly are justified. We must be ungodly before we can be justified. And since the ungodly are incapable of doing anything good, we cannot be justified except by doing nothing at all. It is in this context that we must understand the familiar words from Luther's Small Catechism:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel.

Christian vocation is first of all the call to faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Without faith we have no righteousness at all. Without faith

we cannot worship God. All our works are sin. Indeed, the holier we intend them to be the more outrageously they offend the divine majesty. There can be no talk about Christian vocation apart from the justification of the sinner by faith. For when God calls us to faith He justifies us through faith. And since faith trusts solely in the works of Christ and not in its own works it must be through faith alone that we are justified. So then, before we can speak of what we are called to do we must speak of our call to do nothing at all.

Religious people don't want to do nothing. The religious impulse is to do something. And this refusal of people to do nothing at all is the source of all false teaching and idolatry. It bears the evil fruit of every self-appointed and therefore godless standard of holiness. Religious people refuse to do nothing at all. To require this of them is intolerable. It requires that they repudiate their religion. But they are bound and determined to be faithful to their religion of works. They may agree to listen to a discussion of Christ's holy life, perfect obedience, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection. It makes for good drama, after all, and no religion is complete without the dramatic element. But when God begins to tell the ungodly sinner that he can do and may do nothing whatsoever to advance godliness, it is at that point that God becomes a devil in the mind of the unregenerate but religious man. And so there is no holy vocation. There cannot be. There is only sin and judgment.

God must kill before making alive. He must kill the false faith of the self-righteous sinner. He must destroy his religion of works-righteousness. Only in the destroying of this religion does God call. Indeed, Christian vocation embraces the life-long divine assault against the innate religion of fallen man. The truth confronts the lie and sets the sinner free. In that freedom God calls His children to do freely what they were incapable of doing while under the tyrannical delusion of works-righteousness.

This delusion is grounded in the rejection of a bitter truth that nobody wants to face. It is clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures, but it insults the religious sensibilities of fallen man. The truth is that we are by nature incapable of doing good. We reject this truth because we judge by false appearances. We think that our freedom to choose this or to reject that specific external act of

the body is proof of a spiritual ability to do those things that God requires of us. The Bible teaches something quite different. St. Paul writes:

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:7-8)

Again, he writes:

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:13-14)

The Lutheran Confessions confess this biblical truth quite clearly. We read in the Formula of Concord:

That original sin in human nature is not only a total lack of good in spiritual, divine things, but that at the same time it replaces the lost image of God in man with a deep, wicked, abominable, bottomless, inscrutable, and inexpressible corruption of his entire nature in all its powers, especially of the highest and foremost powers of the soul in mind, heart, and will. As a result, since the Fall man inherits an inborn wicked stamp, an interior uncleanness of the heart and evil desires and inclinations. By nature every one of us inherits from Adam a heart, sensation, and mind-set which, in its highest powers and the light of reason, is by nature diametrically opposed to God and his highest commands and is actually enmity against God, especially in divine and spiritual matters. True, in natural and external things which are subject to reason man still possesses a measure of reason, power, and ability, although greatly weakened since the inherited malady has so poisoned and tainted them that they amount to nothing in the sight of God. (FC SD I 11-12, Tappert)

The religion of works-righteousness teaches that we become righteous by doing righteous things. One becomes good by means of doing good. This is quite impossible. The Lord Jesus teaches the very opposite. He teaches that whoever sins is a slave to sin. A slave cannot set himself free. Only the Son of God can do that. If you believe that doing holy things makes you holy you cannot believe in Jesus. For the one who does that which makes us holy will be the one in whom we trust. If Jesus does what makes us holy we will trust in Him. If we do what makes us holy we will trust in ourselves. The religion of works-righteousness is incompatible with the Christian religion. It does not honor God. It is idolatrous. It falls under the woe of the Holy Scriptures:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20)

Since we are evil by nature when we do what we by nature can do we do evil. When we attempt to make ourselves good by doing evil we are calling evil good. To reject the doing of Christ as the only doing by which we can become holy we are calling good evil. But God threatens to punish those who call evil good and good evil. The prophetic woe stands to the end of time.

When it comes to the doctrine of Christian vocation it matters very much where we begin our discussion. Beginning in the wrong place will permanently skew the discussion. Unfortunately, this is what often happens. Since the topic is vocation, it stands to reason that what one is called to do should be the chief concern. But what stands to reason is wrong. The religion of works-righteousness places what we do at the center of our concern. That's to be expected. In that religion what we do is the foundation for what we are. We become holy by doing holy things. But the call from God is first of all the call to faith. The just shall live by faith. What we do must always be subordinated to what we believe. What we do will be imperfect in this life because the flesh will cling to us as long as we live in these mortal bodies. But what we believe is perfect. It is the gospel of Christ in which there is nothing but purity and perfection. We believe what God teaches. His doctrine is His alone. We are called to live as He commands. But our lives will never reach

perfection this side of eternity. Listen to how Luther contrasts doctrine and life. He writes:

Doctrine is our only light. It alone enlightens and directs us and shows the way to heaven. If it is shaken in one quarter, it will necessarily be shaken in its entirety. Where that happens, love cannot help us at all. We can be saved without love and concord with the Sacramentarians but not without the pure doctrine and faith. . . For this reason, as I often advise, doctrine must be carefully distinguished from life. Doctrine is heaven; life is earth. In life are sin, error, impurity, and misery – with vinegar as men are wont to say. There love should close an eye, should tolerate, be deceived, believe, hope, and bear everything; there the forgiveness of sins should mean most, if only sin and error are not defended. But in doctrine there is no error, and hence no need for any forgiveness of sins. Therefore there is no similarity at all between doctrine and life. One little point of doctrine is worth more than heaven and earth. This is why we cannot bear to have it violated in the least. But to errors of life we can close an eye almost to the point of blindness. For we, too, daily err in life and morals, as all saints do; and these imperfections they confess earnestly in the Lord's Prayer and in the Creed. But by the grace of God our doctrine is pure. All our articles of faith are sound and are grounded in Holy writ. The devil would gladly contaminate and overturn these. Therefore he so cunningly attacks us with the specious argument that the love and harmony of the churches are not to be violated, etc.

God's gospel is a heavenly teaching that enlightens us. This is why the doctrine of the gospel must remain pure even if everything else in the world is polluted and corrupted. For we are called by the gospel. The call from God is a call out of darkness into light. When we walk in darkness we don't know where we are going and we cannot rightly understand what we are doing. The call out of darkness into the light of God's grace is a call to deny ourselves. Jesus says:

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own

soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26)

The call to deny ourselves, to lose our life for Christ's sake, is the invitation to do nothing at all but to rest in the wounds of Jesus. As Jesus said:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

The rest that Jesus gives is the forgiveness of sins. This is the peace that sets our hearts at rest. The burden of our sin that lay heavy upon us is taken off of us and placed on the Lamb of God who bears it all away. We need do nothing to make ourselves righteous. We are righteous by virtue of the righteousness of Jesus that is reckoned to us. We need to do nothing to make ourselves holy. We are holy by virtue of our baptism that has washed all our sins away by the blood of the Lamb shed for us on the cross. We are called to deny everything we have done or could have done whether in service to this or that god or in service to religious standards we chose for ourselves. We are called to die to self and to live a new life. Only when our call from God is grounded in the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ and our justification by God's grace alone through faith in Christ's blood shed for us can we rightly consider and properly understand the doctrine of Christian vocation. There can be no theological shortcut that begins with a consideration of what the Christian is called to do and neglects first to consider what makes a Christian a Christian. For only the good tree can bear good fruit. It is as Jesus says:

Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. (Matthew 7:17-18)

This cannot be overemphasized. It is not something that people naturally accept. It flies in the face of reason. We will not believe it if we rely on observation or common sense. This is a matter of divine revelation. It is a matter of faith. Every philosophical system of ethics determines the good of

the deed according to the deed that is done. Some will judge a deed by its consequences. Others will judge it according to immutable moral laws. Others will insist that the situation itself determines which deed is good and which deed is bad. And, of course, they will argue with each other about whose ethical system is the best. But everyone will begin with the deed and go back to the doer of the deed and define the doer by the deed he has done. But God doesn't do it that way. He begins with the doer of the deed and from there He defines the deed that is done.

The doer of the deed is called to be good. When God says that he is good he is good. When the one God says is good does the deed that God has given him to do that deed is good. This is the Christian doctrine of vocation. The justifying word imputes to us the righteousness of Jesus. This is how the word renders us clean and spotless before God. God says we are righteous. So we are. The word of Jesus both calls and cleanses us. As Jesus says:

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. . . You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another. (John 15:3-5; 16-17)

We cannot love one another until we are made clean by Christ's word. God defines this love. God is its source. This love is eternal. The Father loves the Son from eternity. In time the Son is incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and is made man. He reveals this eternal love in all He says and does. He is begotten from the Father from eternity. He is also chosen or elected from eternity to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is on the cross where He is lifted up to die for us that this love is displayed with crystal clarity. It is given to us in the word by which we are called. It defines our relationship with God and with one another.

B. Called and Elected: Time and Eternity

In order that we can see clearly how faith and love relate to one another in our Christian vocation it may be helpful to take a look at our vocation from the perspective of eternity. St. Paul gives us a glimpse of this in Romans 8:28-30 where we read,

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Who is doing the doing here? It is God from eternity to eternity. Only a fool would try to peek into eternity when he is so obviously bound by time. We can't see tomorrow, much less into the eternal past or into the eternal future. For this reason the doctrine of predestination frightens away many Christians to the extent they either dismiss it out of hand as being contrary to a revered notion of freewill or they discard it as a hopelessly intricate philosophical burden too heavy for them to bear. Please, spare us talk about predestination! We aren't here to endure such imponderables.

But this doctrine is no burden. In fact, it removes all burdens from us. There is no better perspective from which to view our Christian vocation than the perspective of our eternal election by God. So let us examine these inspired words of the apostle.

St. Paul begins by asserting that everything works together for good for those whom God has called. They are identified as those who love God. They love God because God called them to do so. Now let us consider the verbs that follow. In developing the concept of Christian vocation, the apostle assigns the following five verbs to God: God foreknows, God predestines, God calls, God justifies, and God glorifies. Of these five activities ascribed to God, three of them take place in eternity and two take place in time. God foreknows, predestines, and glorifies us in eternity. There is no access to the eternal except through the temporal. We are bound in and by time. God speaks to us

where we are. Of the two activities that occur in time one is revealed and one is hidden. We can identify the hidden only by what is revealed. The call is revealed. You witness Holy Baptism. You hear the words. You feel the water. You see the sign. But you cannot see justification. You cannot feel or touch the forgiveness of sins. You can hear the words that give it but you cannot hear forgiveness. But you most certainly can apprehend the call by your senses. You can identify it quite specifically. God calls us in time and God calls us in a specific place in a specific way by specific means and all of this can be clearly identified.

Have you ever met an evangelist who informed you that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life? No one can argue with that. But when it comes to identifying just what that plan is, well, this is where faith can be sent off course into a dead end. For here it is that God's clear and identifiable call is often replaced by human imagination. What is God's plan for your life? Can you discern God's will? Are you living in God's will or outside of God's will? Where is God leading you? How can you know? Have you talked it over with the Lord in prayer? Have you waited for His guidance? Do it, and then, when He gives you direction, you should follow it. After all, God has a wonderful plan for your life, but it is up to you to discover what it is.

But that's just not true. You have no need at all to learn of God's plan for your life. In fact, you'd be better off not knowing. If God wanted to tell you He'd tell you. Why should you need to know when God knows? After all, it's His plan, not yours. When you imagine that He has told you what He hasn't made plain in the Holy Scriptures you substitute your own notions for God's word. This is the source of no end of trouble. It is quite damaging to faith. It is spiritually dangerous to assign to God your own ideas of what He has planned for you. For if you persuade yourself that your own plans are His plans, then when your plans don't pan out you may begin to question God.

Your baptism stands here in time as the bridge to eternity. It joins you to your election in the eternal past and to your glorification in the eternal future. It calls you into the vocation God has prepared for you. It ushers you into the wonderful plan God has for your life. Far better that you know you are baptized than that you know God's plan for your life. For who and what you

are is not determined by what you will be doing. It is determined by what God has given to you in Holy Baptism.

Your baptism is your call to whatever vocation you have. We must learn to go from the revealed to the hidden, from the outside to the inside. Don't look within yourself to find some kind of divine guidance from which you will gain information on God's plan for your life. Don't pretend that prayer is a means of gaining information from God.

According to last Sunday's Fargo Forum, a 2005 poll of Americans by Newsweek and Beliefnet found that twice as many people felt more connected with God while praying than while in a house of worship. It is clear that people feel closer to God when they are doing the talking than they do when God is talking to them. They believe that divine guidance comes from within themselves. But within ourselves is the trouble from which God must deliver us. When Jesus speaks of God answering prayer He says, "If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." (John 15:7)

Prayer always submits to the clear word of God. When we pray – especially when we pray – we must learn to test and measure every thought and feeling we have by that which is outside of us: the objectively identifiable word of God. Then, guided by God's word and not our own notions, we will be able to find joy in doing what God has called us to do.

Baptism isn't a mere outward expression of the inner faith. It is the source of faith. It is the foundation for faith. For the Lord Jesus Christ has invested in this holy sacrament His divine authority to forgive. "I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." And this remission covers us in everything we think, say, and do. Don't look inward where doubt and sin lurk to con you into doubting God. Look at your call in Holy Baptism. Your baptism remains throughout your life the divine assurance that the forgiveness you hear pronounced upon you in the absolution is intended for you. Your name and God's name are joined. The forgiveness you have by faith is no accidental or temporary blessing. It is guaranteed by your baptism.

What has God called you to do? Whatever it is, God gave you this call in Holy Baptism. When you look to this external and identifiable call God grants you a

glimpse into eternity. From the eternal past He knew you. He didn't merely know that you would some day be born and live and die. He knew you personally and chose you to be His dear child. He predestined you in love to be conformed to Christ's image which is the very image of God. Everything He did in time to accomplish this He chose to do for you, in Christ, that is, for Christ's sake, from eternity. As surely as God calls you in Holy Baptism, He loved you before time began, predestined you to suffer with Christ and be glorified with Him. Your baptism justifies you. It calls you. It not only has the power to transcend space and time to join you in union with the death and resurrection of Christ, it has the power to traverse eternity, binding you today to the eternal gracious decree of God in Christ to justify you and glorify you.

So what has God called you to do? He has called you to love.

Part Two: The Call to Love

A. Faith and Love

The call to do nothing is the call to faith. Faith cannot do something and remain faith. When faith is defined as an activity it is defined contrary to the gospel. Whenever we speak of faith as if it is doing something we are speaking according to a figure of speech known as metonymy. One word is substituted for another word to which it is closely related. For example, Jesus says: "This cup is the New Testament in my blood." He is speaking metonymically, referring to the wine by using the word cup. He does not mean cup when He says cup. He means wine. Likewise, since love is the fruit of faith it is quite common to use the word faith metonymically to mean love. A famous instance of this is found in Luther's definition of faith in his introduction to the Epistle to the Romans from his 1522 translation of the Bible. Luther writes:

Instead, faith is God's work in us that changes us and gives new birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if

good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever.

Luther begins by referring to faith as faith and as he enters into a discussion of the fruit of faith he continues to use the word faith to refer to its fruit. This is a powerful rhetorical device, employed to draw special attention to the inseparable bond between the faith that does nothing and the active love that flows from it. From the call to do nothing comes the call to love. Faith and love cannot be separated. But they must be sharply distinguished. The role of faith cannot be granted to love, nor can the role of love be granted to faith. Confusing what each is will lead to a doctrine of vocation that is decidedly unchristian.

Simply put, we receive the call from God always by faith and by faith alone. It is never by love that the call is received. Our love will only get in the way of faith and fight against it if it is made into a means of receiving the call. God always calls us through faith. We are justified through faith and through faith alone. Our love cannot form or deepen or augment the righteousness by which God justifies us. When it comes to justification, love must remain silent and make no claims. We are called by God as God justifies us. The call from God is always the call of the gospel that forgives us all our sins and sets us before God as saints.

The source of love is justification. God justifies you by calling you and in justifying you He calls you to love. The essence of this love is not ours to determine. St. John writes,

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:10-11)

Since God's love determines for us what love is, we may never define love according to any other standards than God's. This is vital to an understanding of Christian vocation. We are never called to do anything but to love. The form that this love takes is determined by God. Were this love without form it would be void. St. Paul tells us the form that this love is to take. He writes:

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
(Romans 13:8-10)

Our love is of no benefit at all when it comes to receiving the call from God. We have seen that we are called to do nothing before we are called to do anything and love is incapable of doing nothing. Faith is passive. Love is active. Faith receives. Love does. Faith rests still in the wounds of the Savior. Love is busy doing whatever the neighbor needs. Faith does no work but trusts in the work of another. Love flows from faith. We can no more separate faith and love than we can divide the body from the soul, but as important as it is that these two be kept together, they must always be strictly distinguished so that we do not begin to trust in our love and thus trample underneath the blood of the covenant by replacing Christ’s righteousness with our own.

Since the righteous do righteous things, the love that issues from the faith through which we are justified is pure and holy and acceptable to God. It is formed by God Himself. The works that love does are of God’s choosing. St. Paul writes:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Your faith is of no benefit to your neighbor. Faith benefits the one who believes. “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” The faith through which one is saved is always personal. It is confessed corporately but the believing is always personal. I suspect that oftentimes our Evangelical friends think that we Lutherans are denying this fundamental feature of faith when we

reject their decision theology. We deny that faith is a decision of the sinner to invite Jesus into his heart to become his personal Lord and Savior. We do not deny that the faith through which one is justified and saved is personal. We reject decision theology because it changes faith into something else. When faith becomes one's personal decision the human decision becomes the decisive feature of faith. Faith becomes a human work. It is no longer simple trust in what God gives us in His gospel.

But we must not permit our rejection of what is wrong about decision theology lead us to neglect or deny the correct emphasis on the personal nature of faith. Faith is not an inert acceptance of theological propositions. It is personal trust in the gospel of Christ. Trusting in His gospel is trusting in Him. The one who has this personal faith is the only one who benefits from it.

On the other hand, the one who loves receives no spiritual benefit from loving. This is because all possible spiritual benefits are received by faith alone. Since love doesn't benefit the one who loves, and since love defines what a good work in the sight of God is, a good work is never done for the purpose of benefiting the one doing it.

About twenty years ago I participated in a debate with a Mormon at the Missouri Synod campus church in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The debate covered quite a bit of ground and after each of us had had the opportunity to question the other it was opened up to questions from the crowd. A young Mormon, clearly nervous about the possibility of offending me, said that he thought he heard me say (but he was quite sure he heard wrong) that doing good works does not benefit you in any way. I told him that he had heard me correctly. I repeated myself. Doing good works doesn't help you at all. There was an audible collective gasp in the room coming from several mystified Mormons. The young man then blurted out: "Then why do good works?" I replied: "To help your neighbor." There was stunned silence in the room. The Lutherans understood. They had heard it before. The Mormons were simply floored by such a radical notion.

This distinction between faith and love can also be described as two different kinds of righteousness. There is the righteousness of faith and the

righteousness of love. The righteousness of faith is the righteousness that faith receives. It is Christ's righteousness. The righteousness of love is the righteousness that love does. It is the Christian's righteousness. Christ's righteousness is perfect and without flaw. The Christian's righteousness is imperfect and tainted by sin. Christ's righteousness is the beginning and foundation of the Christian's righteousness. The Christian's righteousness is the fruit of Christ's righteousness. Love is the fruit of faith.

During the past generation a doctrine of self-esteem has invaded the church and permeated Christian theology. It posits the claim that if we are to love our neighbor we must first learn to love ourselves. Self-love becomes the basis of loving others. The ego is at the center of love. Love is equated with selfishness. Ayn Rand has been baptized and made into a Christian. Any concept of Christian vocation grounded in the justification of the sinner by God's grace for Christ's sake through faith is lost.

The biblical and Lutheran doctrine of vocation is inextricably bound to the doctrine of justification. The faith by which the sinner is justified is born in repentance. That is to say, it is born in hatred of self. The self-esteem gospel is false at its very root.

Listen to how Luther speaks of the righteousness of love in a sermon he preached on Palm Sunday, 1519:

Therefore it hates itself and loves its neighbor; it does not seek its own good, but that of another, and in this its whole way of living consists. For in that it hates itself and does not seek its own, it crucifies the flesh. Because it seeks the good of another, it works love. Thus in each sphere it does God's will, living soberly with self, justly with neighbor, devoutly toward God.

If you want to find freedom, find it in faith. Don't look for it in love. Faith sets you free from all demands. Love makes you everyone's slave. When faith is attacked, you stand firm and yield nothing. This is self-defense. No human authority has the right to question the authority of Jesus Christ, the sin-bearer, to forgive sins. Faith and the righteousness of faith depend on this

authority. But when love is attacked, confess your sins, humble yourself before others, and take as your example Him who silently bore the abuse and scorn of wicked men even while He was establishing that righteousness by which we are justified through faith alone. For to this you were called.

The self-esteem gospel is nothing but a namby-pamby form of legalism. It teaches you to find within yourself something of which you can be proud. Rejoice in it. In this way you will find yourself able to relate to others in a positive and affirming way. But if you live under judgment of yourself you'll learn to stand in judgment of others. You won't be able to serve anyone else until you learn to serve yourself.

Aside from its transparently self-centered approach to vocation and its sanctification of selfishness, the self-esteem gospel changes the purpose of the law. The law no longer condemns. It enables. This is the essence of legalism. The law becomes the means of obtaining spiritual benefit for the one obeying it. This is true of every form of legalism from the Pharisees of Jesus' day to the slick religious entrepreneurs of the electronic church.

In order that the law may become the means of spiritual gain, it is essential to alter it so as to make it doable. The Pharisees (whose religion became, in time, indistinguishable from Judaism – one reason why the term “Judeo-Christian” is an oxymoron) put a “hedge” around the divine law. They replaced the Ten Commandments with 613 commandments. There were 248 positive obligations and 365 negative prohibitions. These rules were designed to enable practitioners of them to obey the Ten Commandments. The divine law of love was reduced to human rules. Listen to what Jesus had to say about this as St. Matthew recounts (Matthew 15:1-9)

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have

received from me is a gift to God”—then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
And honor Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

Human tradition negates divine law. This is what all forms of legalism do. Nowadays the word “tradition” has a negative connotation. So we hear of principles instead. Do a Google search for “spiritual principles” and you will find such titles as, “Manifest Your Destiny: The Nine Spiritual Principles for Getting Everything You Want” and “Seven Spiritual Principles to Successful Living.” Put principles into practice. It’s all about empowerment. As you apply the spiritual principles you gain control over your life. You’re in charge.

The Christian doctrine of vocation denies this at every level. We aren’t in charge of the righteousness by which we are justified. We aren’t in charge of the call of the gospel that justifies us. And we’re not in charge of what we are called by God to do. God is.

Legalism is designed to replace God’s authority with human authority. It is easy to discern whether or not the rules established by human authority are being violated. A man is working on the Sabbath or he is resting. You either drink and smoke or you don’t. Sin becomes easily identifiable. Anyone who knows the rules can identify sin. Legalism redefines sin so that it is clearly visible to man and thus controllable and measurable by means of human effort. Pious pretences to seeking divine guidance and direction notwithstanding, legalism seeks to eliminate God’s authority. Antinomians are those who reject God’s law quite openly and boldly, claiming that it does not apply for one reason or another. Legalists are those who replace God’s law with their own rules, traditions, principles, or whatever. Legalism and antinomianism are, at root, the same. The divine law exposes both and both seek to destroy the authority that exposes them. Once the divine law is

silenced by human authority the gospel becomes merely academic knowledge and thus irrelevant to the Christian's life. This results in a dead orthodoxy where the doctrine matters little and our holding on to it is merely another religious obligation to fulfill.

God calls us into freedom, but God never puts us in charge. Christian vocation is not simply a matter of applying legal principles to this or that human activity. For the application of legal principles always puts the one who applies them in charge. But God is in charge. Christian vocation is a matter of submission to God. First we are called to faith. God defines and forms it. Then we are called to love. Again, God defines and forms it.

B. The Form of Love

The Ten Commandments set the form for the love that marks our vocation. We are called to love. Love is a verb. Love does. It doesn't construct abstract theories about what to do in this or that or the other hypothetical circumstance. In a day of diminished moral discernment it may appear helpful to delve more deeply into moral theology as a discipline. I ran across a college textbook on Catholic Moral Theology several years ago and was impressed by the careful reasoning that went into the moral distinctions and the setting forth of a clear hierarchy of moral standards. I found it persuasive and intellectually stimulating. Who can deny that Christians need to learn how to make moral decisions? But there is something much more useful than the development of moral theory as an abstract discipline. That would be committing the Ten Commandments and the explanations provided in Luther's Small Catechism to memory. There is a reason we require our catechumens to memorize the Ten Commandments and Luther's explanations. This is the framework within which we live the lives of love that God has called us to live. The shape of the Christian's vocation – regardless of the specifics of the station to which he is called – has already been determined by the Ten Commandments. We need not learn how to parse the grammar of an abstract system of morality as if to justify our behavior. We are already justified by Christ's blood. We need rather learn how to love our neighbor.

Luther's explanation to the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism is the best book of Christian vocation ever written. The First Table of the law

pertains to true faith in God and true love for God. The First Commandment calls for faith. “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” The Second Commandment calls for prayer, for without God’s help, we cannot but fall into unbelief and every kind of sin. Therefore we should “call upon [God’s name] in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.” The Third Commandments directs us to the source of faith and love: God’s word which, if we “hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it,” will establish us in the true faith and be the means by which the Holy Spirit will pour God’s love into our hearts.

Just as the First Commandment is the foundation for all the following commandments, so is the Fourth Commandment the foundation for everything that follows. All human relationships can be placed into three general categories: domestic, ecclesiastical, and civil. The domestic estate is primary. Prior to the existence of church or state – while His creation was as yet untainted by sin – God made man in His image, both male and female, joined them in marriage and promised to bless them with children. Thus, the office of father and mother was placed into creation in our innocence before the Fall. Because of sin the parental, that is, the domestic estate is identified by the Fourth Commandment. After all, the law is made for sinners, not for righteous people. But the domestic estate, unlike the ecclesiastical and civil estates, existed in Paradise when there was as yet no sin.

After the Fall, God established both the ecclesiastical estate and the civil estate. To the church He gave the gospel so that faith might be born. To the civil authorities God gave the power to coerce outward obedience by the threat of punishment. The Old Testament does not have that clear distinction between church and state that we find in the New Testament, but the difference between spiritual and temporal authority is clearly distinguished throughout the Holy Scriptures. The spiritual authority is the authority of the gospel to forgive sins. The temporal authority is the authority of coercion to maintain order in the world. The spiritual authority does not coerce. The temporal authority has no power to forgive sins. The spiritual authority has no power over the body. The temporal authority has no power over the soul.

The bridge between the ecclesiastical estate and the civil estate is the domestic estate, which preceded both of them and upon which both of them depend. To father and mother God has given both spiritual and civil authority. Indeed, all civil authority is derivative of the domestic estate. The Fourth Commandment tells us to honor father and mother. In the Catechism we learn that this applies as well to “masters” or “other authorities” or “superiors.”

Likewise, the spiritual authority given to the church is also present in the home as both Moses and Paul teach fathers to bring up their children in the nurture of God’s word. Moses writes:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.
(Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

St. Paul writes:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.
(Ephesians 6:1-4)

Examples of devout mothers from Hannah to Lois and Eunice show that the spiritual care that women provide for their children is necessary for the maintenance of the office of the holy ministry that belongs to the church.

When it comes to Christian vocation, the domestic estate dominates the discussion. Consider, for example, the Fifth Chief Part of the Catechism, where we are asked which sins we should confess. Here is how the answer begins: “Here consider your station according to the Ten Commandments,

whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant.” Notice how most of the stations in life mentioned fall under the domestic estate. In the Table of Duties, Luther sets forth the biblical duties incumbent upon twelve distinct vocations: 1) For bishops, pastors and preachers; 2) What the hearers owe to their pastors; 3) Concerning civil government; 4) What subjects owe to the magistrates; 5) For husbands; 6) For wives; 7) For parents; 8) For children; 9) For male and female servants, hired men, and laborers; 10) For masters and mistresses; 11) For young people in general; and 12) For Widows. Again, notice how the domestic estate dominates.

The home is where our picture of God is formed. Martin Luther, in the Large Catechism, speaks of a “majesty hidden within” our parents. (LC, I, 106) To honor father and mother is to honor God Himself. This is what children are called to do. They are called to do so when they are children. They are called to do so when they are grown. Their doing of it is precious. The value of the honor that a child shows to his parents is not determined by the child, the parents, popular opinion, or the church. It is determined by God. Listen to comments from Luther on the Fourth Commandment from the Large Catechism:

You should rejoice heartily and thank God that he has chosen and fitted you to perform a task so precious and pleasing to him. Even though it seems very trivial and contemptible, make sure that you regard it as great and precious, not on account of your worthiness but because it has its place within that jewel and holy treasure, the Word and commandment of God. O how great a price all the Carthusian monks and nuns would pay if in the exercise of their religion they could bring before God a single work done in accordance with his commandment and could say with a joyful heart in his presence, “Now I know that this work is well pleasing to Thee!” What will become of these poor wretched people when, standing before God and the whole world, they shall blush with shame before a little child that has lived according to this commandment and confess that with the merits of their whole lives they are not worthy to offer him a cup of water? It serves them right for their devilish perversity in trampling God’s commandment

under foot that they must torture themselves in vain with their self-devised works and meanwhile have only scorn and trouble for their reward. (LC I 117-119)

Self-devised works stand in opposition to God-ordained works. Nothing is more precious than honoring our parents.

God has not called us to dishonor those in authority but to honor them. While every Christian has the duty to confess what is right and true, no Christian has the obligation to disobey the government unless the government requires the Christian to disobey God. As American Christians we need to hear this. Martin Luther King's doctrine of civil disobedience was wrong and contrary to the biblical teaching on Christian vocation. Christians have no right, to say nothing of a duty, to disobey unjust laws. Consider St. Paul's letter to Philemon. You cannot read this short letter without knowing that Paul wanted Philemon to grant Onesimus his freedom. But the apostle did not require it. I do not believe that the Apostle approved of slavery. Indeed, slavery as an institution runs counter to Paul's teaching. But neither did he believe in civil disobedience as a public confession. He encouraged Christian slaves to submit to their masters. A Christian can serve in a holy vocation even when it requires him to suffer injustice. For this is what our Lord suffered, leaving us an example to follow.

God does not call us to do what He has not commanded be done. The call is always from God. The call is always from faith to love. God determines the form that love takes by His holy commandments. It is not a good work when it is not commanded by God.

Part Three: The Divine Call

A Christian has but one call. It is the call of the gospel to faith. St. Peter writes:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him

who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

The call out of darkness into light is the call to faith and from faith to love. This is the vocation of every Christian. When we use the word vocation, however, we are ordinarily referring to a particular job or position or responsibility that one has. The Catechism uses the term “station in life.” This is the concrete context within which we are to love our neighbor.

The call of the Christian is from God. It is divine. God calls us to be holy and by His call renders us holy. God chooses holy works for His holy people to do. These works are holy because the holy God has commanded them. They are holy because they are done by God’s holy people. They are precious to God. Luther writes:

Who can adequately proclaim the usefulness and the effect of even one work that a Christian does in faith and on the basis of faith? It is more precious than heaven and earth. Therefore the whole world cannot grant a reward in this life equal to the value of one truly good work.

What is your job? Are you a mother, a father, a son, a daughter, a farmer, a laborer, a schoolteacher, a businessman, a student, a husband, a wife, a preacher, a grandfather, a lawyer, an administrator, a grandmother, a civil servant? The parameters of your specific station or stations in life may vary and change with time. The duty to love and the form that love takes will not change. A student is to study diligently, do honest research, attend classes, and show the teacher due respect. The husband is to love his wife with a devotion that puts her needs above his wants. A preacher is to study God’s word, preach it and teach it faithfully, and care for the spiritual needs of the congregations he serves. A laborer is to give an honest day’s work for his wages and to regard the property of his employer with as much respect and concern as he regards his own. Schoolteachers are to treat the students with the same paternal or maternal devotion that they would show if the students were their own children.

When a Christian does these things he is offering up to God what is precious to Him. We show forth the praises of God by doing what God calls us to do. The essence of what we are called to do is to love. The form love takes is determined by the Ten Commandments. This love is no abstract concept. It is always realized in concrete specificity as it finds expression in carrying out the various duties imposed by our station or stations in life.

But we don't do our duties as we should. In fact, we sin in everything we do. How can sin be made holy? Clearly, it cannot. When God justifies the sinner He does not justify sin. He forgives it. He covers it. He remits it. He removes it by a gracious decree that speaks from the vicarious intervention of Jesus Christ, the Righteous. Now there remains nothing but righteousness, for the sin is forgiven. The holy deeds that the holy God gave His holy people to do are purged of the sin that attached itself to them.

This gracious decree is no mere theological construction that we ponder in our hearts. It is a public preaching of the Holy Spirit. God Himself speaks words that enter into our ears and we receive the promises these words provide. We sin. We confess. God absolves. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) So life goes. Justification is not a process in the sense that it is incomplete and reaching toward perfection. But it is a continual thing. One doesn't get justified and then that's the end of it. God justifies us every time He speaks His justifying words to us. Faith lives on this word of justification. We are called to express this faith in love. The love is defined by the Ten Commandments. It is expressed in the specific vocations in which God has placed us. It is corrupted in its very active tasks from within and without. And so this imperfect and sin-tainted love must constantly be rendered holy by means of the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness to us.

There is no greater responsibility in this world than to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments of Christ through which God justifies sinners and makes them saints. Apart from the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments no righteousness is bestowed, no faith is born, no love is elicited, and no holy vocation is realized in the lives of anyone

at all. There can be no doubt that preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments is the most important task God has given us to do.

But it does not follow from this that those who do this work do holier deeds than those whose vocations require of them different duties. As we have seen, we do not judge the goodness of a deed by the deed itself but by the goodness of the one doing it. The deeds are holy because they are done by holy people. The Christian mother who wipes the snot off her baby's nose and changes dirty diapers is doing deeds as holy and precious in the sight of God as is the pastor who preaches the gospel and administers the sacraments. True, you can enter into heaven with a snotty nose and dirty diapers, whereas the gospel the preacher preaches is the power of God unto salvation, the baptism with which he baptizes saves, and the Lord's Supper he administers gives the forgiveness of sins. But the God who justifies sinners by the reckoning of the gospel word the preachers preach is the same God who values the offerings of His children by the measurement of the merits of Christ's blood.

As we sing:

I have naught, my God, to offer,
Save the blood of Thy dear Son;
Graciously accept the proffer:
Make His righteousness mine own.
His holy life gave He, was crucified for me;
His righteousness perfect He now pleads before Thee;
His own robe of righteousness, my highest good,
Shall clothe me in glory, through faith in His blood. (ELH 182 verse
6)

The only value our works have is a borrowed value, regardless of how important the work is. That borrowed value comes solely from the blood and righteousness of Jesus by which everything the saints do is sanctified.

The church cannot provide any more sanctity than that provided by the gospel and sacraments of Christ. In the Creed we confess that we believe in the Communion of Saints. The holy people are made holy by means of the holy

things they receive. They aren't made holy by means of the holy things that they do. The minister who preaches the gospel and administers the sacraments of Christ is not sanctified by means of his preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. What sanctifies his labor for the Lord and makes it holy is the same thing that sanctifies the labor for the Lord of every other member of the congregation. It is the hearing of the gospel and the receiving of the sacraments in faith through which we are sanctified. One achieves no holier status when he is called and ordained into the office to which the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments have been entrusted. To teach that some works are holier than other works because they are done in the church or for the church or by someone who has received a call from the church is to distort the gospel. There is no greater holiness than what we sinners receive by simple faith in the gospel and sacraments. To suggest that a Christian who is called to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments has a holier calling than a Christian who drives a truck for a living is to set aside the doctrine of justification and replace it with the false doctrine of works-righteousness.

The truck driver is obliged to pay the taxes due, to follow the regulations that govern his business, to be faithful in every relationship, and to reflect the love of God in Christ in all that he says and does. He must do so when people don't know he's a Christian because you can't tell by looking at him. His holy vocation is a part of his life – a part of him – because he doesn't just drive a truck. He serves God by loving his neighbor in doing his job faithfully and honestly. This is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God.

The Christian high school student who refuses to work on Sunday mornings because he needs to go to church does a good work, a holy work, pleasing to God. When he insists on attending the Divine Service before coming to work he confesses the faith by which sinners are justified and saved. The same student who expresses his rejection of evolution, his opposition to abortion, homosexuality, and other sins, and his belief that Jesus Christ is the only Savior sinners have is confessing the faith to which God called him. He's doing what Jesus did when He made the good confession before Pontius Pilate.

Christian truck drivers, Christian high school students, and Christians in a whole host of God-pleasing vocations express their faith in love for their neighbors every day of the week. They are called by God to do so, and they don't need a call from the church in addition to what God gives in His precious means of grace. No higher spiritual status can be obtained in this world than that bestowed by God in Holy Baptism.

Martin Luther preached against the false notion that the celibate life of the monastery was superior to the married life lived out in the world. Love for neighbor is best expressed, not in avoiding interaction with those outside the church, but in working for them and with them and in serving them in Christian love. There is a modern monasticism among Lutherans that suggests that doing something "for the church" is somehow superior to doing something disconnected from the church. This notion has led to a proliferation of "ministries" as more and more people seek ecclesiastical sanction for their vocations.

But they don't need them. With what can the church sanctify anything at all? What does she have? She has God's word and that's all she has. To issue "divine calls" to various "ministries" invented by Christians as if God is thereby bestowing a sanctity upon these vocations that He wouldn't otherwise bestow is to return to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the church. Rome claims churchly authority beyond the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Rome says it is holy because the church does it. But that's not so. It is holy because it is sanctified by God's word.

The word vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare* which means to call. Since the call is from God we may say that every Christian has a divine call. But here is where just a little bit of confusion sets in. Whereas we could use the term "divine call" to refer to the divinely given vocation of every Christian, the church has traditionally used the term "divine call" with specific reference to the public ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. We read in Romans 10:15, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" This is a standard proof text for the requirements we Lutherans set down in the Augsburg Confession, Article XIV, which says: "Our churches teach that nobody should preach publicly in the church or

administer the sacraments unless he is regularly called.” God sends those the church calls. The apostles were sent immediately, that is, directly by the Lord Jesus Himself. In the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus recorded for us in the four Gospels we read how He sent out the original preachers and gave them and their successors the divine mandate to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments throughout the whole world until the end of time. Unless the preachers are sent by God they have no right to preach. God said through Jeremiah, the prophet:

I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. (Jeremiah 23:21)

You cannot trust a preacher who has not been sent by God to preach.

That the original apostles were sent by Jesus is undeniable. The very word “apostle” means one who is sent. Their successors in the preaching office are also sent by God. We read in Acts 20:28 that the presbyters or elders of Ephesus, also called pastors and bishops, who were charged to feed the whole church of God were put into office by the Holy Spirit. The mediate call, that is the call from God through the church, is as divine as the immediate call. So while we Lutherans do not insist on apostolic succession by an unbroken chain of the laying on of the hands from the apostles to this day as is claimed by our friends in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communions, we do insist that we have the apostolic ministry of the word. This ministry belongs to the whole church, specifically every single Christian congregation, and through the church God Himself calls men to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments and through these, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit works faith where and will He pleases in those who hear the gospel.

Within the traditions of the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, and the Norwegian Synod – the synods that made up the Synodical Conference of the Nineteenth Century – there were a variety of opinions on the matter of a “divine call” for a parochial schoolteacher. Some connected the schoolteacher’s office to the pastoral office and taught that he had a call derived from the pastor’s call. This became the dominant view in the Missouri

Synod, though there have always been some in Missouri who held that the office of schoolteacher was derived entirely from the parental or domestic estate. Still others, notably the so called Wauwatosa theologians from the Wisconsin Synod in the early Twentieth Century, developed the theory that God didn't really institute any particular office of the ministry but simply gave the church *Carte Blanche* to form as many offices as she chose in which this or that duty of the preaching office would be carried out. According to this opinion the parochial schoolteacher has a divine call into the public ministry of the word just as the pastor does, albeit to a more limited form of it than the form of the parish pastor.

We don't have the time today to delve deeply into these views and the various controversies that ensued over the years. Suffice it to say, the debate rages in our day and likely won't be settled until Christ, the Good Pastor, returns to judge the living and the dead. But the confusion about the "divine call" has, I believe, damaged our appreciation of the divine vocation of the Christian day schoolteacher.

I hope you don't mind if I have some personal observations and make reference to my own personal experiences. I come from the frigid North where we don't believe in getting personal, except perhaps with members of your own family, but down here in Oklahoma I imagine that sharing personal religious experiences is pretty standard. For some reason unknown to me God chose to bless my wife and me with twelve children. Our children have attended both public and parochial schools. They attended parochial schools from 1983 to 1997 and spent a total of 73 years under the care of parochial schoolteachers. I became a father in 1976 and I became a pastor in 1979 so I have a little bit of experience in both of these divinely instituted vocations. I have related to parochial schoolteachers both in my capacity as their pastor and in my capacity as the father of children entrusted to their care in the classroom. I have taught my children as a pastor and as a father. I have catechized hundreds of children of all ages over the years.

I am persuaded that we have done a great disservice to Christian parochial schoolteachers by teaching them that they have a call from God through the church into some kind of a ministerial office of the church. It is true that the

congregation establishes the school. It is true that the teacher teaches God's word to the children. It is true that Christian day school teachers are under the doctrinal oversight of the called and ordained ministers of the word. All of these things might lead one to adopt the view that the parochial school teacher serves in the ministry of the church and should receive a divine call from the church.

But God has given the duties of the Christian schoolteacher to the parents of the children. I would submit to you that there is no higher calling from God than to be a father or a mother. God established this holy vocation in creation before there was a church or a state. What God established in creation He reestablished in the giving of the Ten Commandments, making the Fourth Commandment the foundation for every commandment that follows it. Not only is the integrity and health of the home necessary for the maintenance of order in the nation, it is vital for the health of the church as well. The actual task of a Christian day schoolteacher is not to act as a pastor for the children but to act as their father or mother.

I know what a pastor is. I know what a father is. I know what a schoolteacher is. I have been all three. And I know that the duties of the pastor and the duties of the schoolteacher are fundamentally different.

Pastors cannot exercise any form of physical discipline. We cannot impose timeouts on erring members. We cannot give a detention to the man who gets drunk and beats up his wife. We can't assign sentences to the parishioner who falls into the same sin again and again. We cannot give out a failing grade to the parishioner who sleeps during the sermon. We can preach the gospel and administer the sacraments of Christ. No one can be put on probation. We must rely completely on persuasion. A pastor cannot rely on coercion. He cannot make demands beyond that which is clearly set forth in God's word, and then he can only point to what is written. He cannot impose his will, even when his will is informed by God's word. His office is the ministry of reconciliation. The purpose of his office is that Christians hear the gospel by which they are justified. If the minister of the word were to rely on rules, coercion, or measurements of spiritual progress what kind of minister would

he be? An insufferable legalist to be marked and avoided by all Christians who hunger and thirst for the righteousness of Christ!

A schoolteacher couldn't survive for one week with the restrictions that must be applied to a pastor. His duties, like the duties of fathers and mothers, embrace both the ecclesiastical and the civil estates, and should he neglect his authority to keep order in the classroom, watch out!

So then why do we speak of a "divine call" for schoolteachers in Christian day schools? Is it not to acknowledge that the work they do is divinely ordained and that God blesses it? Is it not to confess that the teaching of God's word to God's children is a holy thing to do and those who are entrusted with this holy task must be gifted by God to do it? All this we can and should confess, and we can do so by grounding the office of schoolteacher in the parental estate where it belongs. Every Christian father and mother has a divine call to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to indoctrinate them in the rudiments of Christian teaching, to provide a Christian example for them, to teach them how to get along in life, and to love them as precious gifts of God. To entrust their instruction to a Christian schoolteacher is all the "divine call" a schoolteacher needs.

Every single Christian is divinely called and every single Christian vocation is offered up to God and graciously accepted by Him. We should not speak of a "divine call" to a parochial schoolteacher as coming from God through the church for there is nothing given to the schoolteacher to do that is not given to the parents of the children to do first. The office of schoolteacher derives entirely from the office of father and mother and not from the public ministerial office that Christ has established in and for the church.

This is Luther's position on the matter and the teaching of our Lutheran Confessions. In the Large Catechism under the Fourth Commandment Luther writes:

Out of the authority of parents all other authority is derived and developed. Where a father is unable by himself to bring up his child, he calls upon a schoolmaster to teach him; if he is too weak, he

enlists the help of his friends and neighbors; if he passes away, he confers and delegates his authority and responsibility to others appointed for the purpose. (LC I 141)

There can be no divine call from God through the church to an office in the church that God hasn't established. To teach schoolteachers that they have a gospel ministry is to mislead them. Much of what they must achieve as schoolteachers simply cannot be achieved by the gospel. Their responsibilities are fundamentally different than those assigned to the ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, but they are no less divine.

There is no pecking order among the various Christian vocations to which God calls His children. It's not as if this Christian has a higher or holier status than that Christian. Our only righteousness is Christ's. Is there something lacking in His holiness? Or do we need to supplement it with our own? As far as the ministers of the word are concerned, they are all equal. They all have the same duties. They preach the gospel and administer the sacraments of Christ. They aren't holier than other Christians because of the office to which they have been called.

The dignity of the domestic estate has been neglected and denigrated not only by libertine forces outside of the church that promote every kind of sexual and familial deviancy imaginable, but by Christians within the church who fail to honor the holy vocation of Christian father and mother. It is within the home that the vocation of the Christian takes shape. By all means, we should give our offering to the church. It is our duty. If we have the time, the inclination, and the ability, by all means we should volunteer our time to help in those areas where we can help. But the church would be better served if we as fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters were to regard the works of love we do in the home as the offerings most precious to our gracious God. The greatest love we can show our children is to teach them God's word so that they can confess it before men as Christ our Lord tells us to do. Faith alone makes us Christians, but by our confession the world knows we are Christians. And there is no vocation to which God calls His children where they cannot confess Christ as the Redeemer of the world and the Savior of sinners.

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