# Faithful & Afire

# LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2012-2013 Called To Be Christ's Witnesses

Called to perceive by faith and to proclaim the unseen works of God amidst the things that are seen.

Participant's Guide – January 2013

Topic: God's Witness to His Unseen Works of the Law and the Gospel amidst the things seen.

#### 1. Focus

The stereoscope was a favorite parlor novelty of an earlier age. It is a simple device made of two separate lenses through which parallel yet essentially different photographs of the same object were able to be seen in true relief. Only by the use of both lenses could the full dimensional depth and richness of an object be seen. The human eye easily mistakes one original image from its twin, but through the instrumentality of the stereoscope, photos are intentionally and necessarily distinguished. Each is viewed in balance, each serving singular aims yet holding the mutual goal of revealing one proper likeness in fullest dimension.

The Law and the Gospel of God's pure Word share the ultimate aim of bringing God's salvation in Christ to humanity. Both are necessary to that object. Alone, the Gospel of Christ is incomprehensible. Likewise, the Law alone has no benefit except as preparatory for the Gospel. Both are testaments of God with distinctive purposes, but the full beauty of God's hidden workings is revealed only when these two tenets serve in collaboration.

This study is not meant to focus on the reciprocity of Law and Gospel which Lutheran pastors know so well, but upon the equanimity of these two ways through which God deals with mankind to proclaim His unseen works.

Read Luke 24:45-47 and Mark 1:14-15. Why do "repentance and forgiveness of sins" have such proximity in the teaching and preaching of Christ?

The work of constantly distinguishing Law and Gospel is a cardinal requirement in the conducting of the holy ministry. How would it help the hearer of our various pastoral conversations, (i.e. Bible study, sermon, counseling, etc.), if the words of the Law were highlighted with red ink and the words of the Gospel were highlighted with a yellow marker?

#### 2. Scripture Search

Read the account of Cain and Abel at Genesis 4:1-16. Certain facts are evident. What can you discern behind surface details? Describe first the situation in which the brothers conduct themselves in vs. 3-4. Of what does God approve? With what is God displeased?

What, if anything, was there to outwardly distinguish the brothers? What constituted the unseen difference according to Hebrews 11:4?

What explains Cain's acute anger?

What unseen work of the Law operates upon Cain? Consider measures of the law both preceding and subsequent to the presentation of his offering. Read Luke 16:1-2 for a suggestion of what may have driven Cain's initial attitude. How does Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) illustrate Cain's subsequent sense of injustice?

How could Romans 9:14-24 serve as a beneficial commentary for a pastor in ministry to someone like Cain, who acknowledges accountability but resents the demands and consequences of the law? Bear in mind the question God posed to Cain, "If you do well, will you not be accepted?"

Return to Genesis 4. In the record of Cain's expulsion, identify two ways in which God reveals Himself. Reference Matthew 25:24-25 and 2 Peter 3:9.

What unseen work of the Gospel operates upon Cain? What instance reveals that God is gracious?

Two adjacent aspects of God are distinguished in Romans 11:22, "*Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.*" Read now Romans 2:1-5. What is God's goal in revealing both his severity and his sufferance?

### 3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Divorce the Law from the Gospel. Luther said the man able to accomplish this should be called a Doctor of Holy Scripture. Yet, to paraphrase a famous couplet, can we say, "The Gospel alone saves, but the Gospel is never alone"? What pastoral value is there in the paradox that Law and Gospel are divorced but never separated?

Gene Edward Veith has written, "I think it's important to realize this about God-something probably only knowable through His revelation in the Incarnate Son-that His deepest nature is life-giving, expressed in the Gospel, and that His wrath, while very real, being a function of His holiness, is somehow alien to His nature, though something He uses to bring us to Himself." Discuss your understanding of God's proper and alien works and how these relate to the Law and the Gospel in perceiving that which is unseen.

In what sense must a pastor be stubbornly a preacher of the Gospel or he is no good for his office? See 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

Read John 15:10-14. Here our Lord beautifully intertwines Law and Gospel. What occurs if the right balance, illustrated by Jesus, is not maintained? What focus is lost?

#### 4. Points to Ponder

Abel still speaks through his faith though he died (Hb. 11:4). Men in the office of ministry speak an enduring Word. Not for the moment only, but as lasting expressions of Law and Gospel, the pastor warns and invites, condemns and absolves that God may accomplish His purpose when He determines. Perhaps only in some later changed circumstance does God's Word strike home. Discuss how Law and Gospel serve both tactical and strategic aims.

Jesus did not come to blame, but to absolve and vindicate sinners (John 5:45). If someone perceives a pastor as a referee come only to critique, condemn, or charge for God's amnesty, they will fail to see Christ's invisible fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:17). The pastor is not second-in-command to Moses but Christ's ambassador of forgiveness. How burdensome to a loving pastor if his service is misunderstood and alleged to be predominated by the Law. In such circumstance he will have the heady temptation of being either feared or flattered by those unable to see the supremacy of the Gospel. Fear or flattery of a pastor is reckoned according to Moses and obscures the presence of Christ hidden

in the holy ministry. A loving pastor is mindful that Jesus neither accepted praise from men (John 5:41) nor did he give the repentant cause to fear (Matthew 5:4).

To admit need for the Spirit's witness concerning the eternal, unseen things of God is no assumption of clarity in regard to temporal things. Pastors know we often can misread even the obvious. Discuss the pastoral link between faithfulness in proclaiming the unseen works of God and good judgment in regards to the visible circumstances of the world.

#### 5. For Conversation

In the rough and tumble realities of pastoral ministry, one never knows what particular joys, sorrows, issues or dilemmas, might arise. Every circumstance is prime pastoral opportunity for witness to the unseen works of God. Law and Gospel provide the universally useful and absolutely vital perspective without which ministry would be impossible.

Consider one or more of the following scenarios. What would God have revealed about Himself in each situation? Each circumstance is undeniably real, temporal, and personally crucial. But what do you see through the service of Law and Gospel to best help others to see God's unseen work?

# To the Hurting - Law and Gospel

• A widow has an adult child who suffers from addictions. Disappointments resulting from a wasted life create resentments that spill over into demands, abusiveness, and general violations of the fourth commandment. The widow comes to her pastor with her woes. Simply by confiding her story, she implicitly asks, "Can't you do something, Pastor?" Her hurts are very temporal, very real, and very hard. She encounters obstacles in every direction. How does a pastor testify to the unseen and eternal works of God in the midst of this?

## To the Hopeful - Law and Gospel

• An infertile couple enthusiastically shares with a pastor that a sister has offered to serve as a surrogate mother and that in-vitro methods are available and promising.\* Their hopes are powerful. Their disappointments have been many. Affirmation already from friends has produced an expectation of pastoral support. "Pastor, might this be God's answer?" How does a pastor testify to the unseen and eternal works of God in the midst of this?

#### To the Hapless - Law and Gospel

• Chronically indifferent to pastoral care, a thirty-something father lands in the hospital with thromboembolic pulmonary hypertension, but he is cavalier, believing he can talk his way out of any difficulty, temporal or spiritual. He has a maddingly condescending knack for saying what he believes a pastor wants to hear. "Pastor, maybe God's trying to tell me something, but I already know what you're going to say." Does he? How does a pastor testify to the unseen and eternal works of God in the midst of this?

#### To the Homesick - Law and Gospel

• He wants to go home, but God is too slow. He wants to know why. He wants to know why God lets the misery of old age linger so long. He's ready to go home and is no good to anybody. "Pastor, I just wish either that it was over or I could do something useful!" How does a pastor testify to the unseen and eternal works of God in the midst of this?

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\*A helpful resource in providing Lutheran answers to these issues is <u>Holy People, Holy Lives</u> pp.117-128 Richard Eyer,CPH 2000.