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# I AM A NEW CREATION

Keynote Address for the Martin Luther Lutheran Church Spiritual Growth Seminar  
February 4, 2012

It had been a long day and Craig was tired. A big, strong man, he was not afraid of hard work, but this day had worn him out. His was a close knit family and getting home to dinner with his family made the whole day worth it. While enjoying dinner with his three sons and his wife, the phone rang. It was work. There was a problem. Somebody messed up. And from Craig's mouth came a stream of expletives burning up the phone line, his three impressionable sons listening to it all.

Craig attended church and Bible Class weekly. He was an Elder and on the church council. He was a spiritual leader for his family and now he had failed – again. The Apostle Paul told us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” We are new, he tells us. Why do we have so much trouble living like it?

You know what I mean. You have good intentions of having daily devotions in God's Word. But you sit down at night and you are just too tired to pick up the Meditations. Your wife asks you a simple question and you give her a sarcastic response. You don't know why; she just brings it out of you. And let's not even discuss our patience behind the wheel of the car. We are new, Paul tells us. We don't feel new. We don't seem to live like we are new. If we are new, why do we have such a hard time living new?

This is an important question not only for our personal lives, but also for the church. Do Lutheran churches have anything to offer people who are struggling to cope with the temptations of our age? “People want more than formulas; they want a faith which is a living reality. Christians want help for the daily life of sanctification, and they are looking for more than just pious generalities.”<sup>1</sup> This question also has an impact on our outreach. “Many so-called seekers are searching for a form of spirituality which will help them feel more ‘sanctified’ (even if they have never heard the word).”<sup>2</sup>

So today we have gathered to discuss this new life we have in Christ and how to live it. May God bless our study of his Word today.

## WHAT'S NEW?

### NEW IN CONTRAST TO OLD

What does Paul mean by saying that we are new? “New” implies a change. We were old. Now we are new. But what was wrong with the old? Everything. Here is one of Paul's descriptions of the old: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Senkbeil, *Sanctification: Christ in Action*, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> John Brug, “The Lutheran Doctrine of Sanctification and its Rivals” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 101, No. 3, p. 184.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices.”<sup>3</sup> It is an ugly picture and if you can’t see yourself in that picture, you aren’t looking hard enough. And that’s just the covering. The inside is even worse. How did we get that way? It all started with that old man, Adam. Adam was mankind and mankind was Adam. When Adam ate that fruit, we were there.

“We were all there . . . blush-warmed faces, hunched shoulders and senses straining at the dread approach of God. . . .

“Our lips still moist from the fruit of ill-gotten wisdom. And there we stood, using for cover the very trees we should have hung from. . . . What had we done—Adam, you and I?

“Do you remember how we knelt in the dust east of Eden? How we raised handfuls of that cursed soil prayer-like to the sky? And how we let the dust pour down between our fingers? And how those dust clouds became the very substance of our dreams? Remember the great towers, the fortified cities and the name we would make for ourselves? Those were some dreams alright. Dreams of what we would bring forth from out of the dust. A new garden perhaps? Or maybe even heaven itself! (How little notice we gave the legless beast—was it smirking?—as it watched us there on its belly in the dust. Was it proud of us or did it just know something that we didn't?).

“You remember how we poured ourselves into that dust, don't you? How we tried to bring life out of the dust as God had once done? But no matter where we cast the seed of our heart, in the end, all we harvested were more handfuls of dust. . . . What then did we have to show for all of our "god-like" understanding?

“Tell me. What have we ever been able to add to our existence that God had not already given us? Arrogance? Okay, arrogance. Lies? Well, yes, and lies. And I guess there's gossip, and hollowed-out hearts of spent lovers, and a native language of four-lettered words, and impotent consciences, and crushed spirits, and jealousy, and rage, and vindictiveness, and brutality, and . . . shall I go on?

“No. You remember, don't you? We had come to know evil as a husband "knows" his wife. We wore evil until it became our skin. There was now something so very familiar about it as it looked back at us in the mirror. We who would be wise, did we not now know both good and evil? But were we really "wise like God" as the serpent promised? You know better now, don't you? The more we knew evil the less we really knew good—the less we knew God. And professing to be wise we became fools.

“We were all as one man then. And since. No, I'm not forgetting Babel. It's just that however divided we became among ourselves, we still stood as one man in our heart against the heart of God. We stood there naked of righteousness before the Holy One. And we knew it. And it galled us to no end. There just had to be a way around God to life.”<sup>4</sup>

So we came to hate God. “The sinful mind is hostile to God.”<sup>5</sup> We hated God because there was no righteousness, no peace, no life except in him. We wanted to find life on our own, but we couldn't. We were dead. That is the

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<sup>3</sup> Colossians 3:5-7. All Scripture quotes are from NIV 1984.

<sup>4</sup> David L. Roth at [www.kerux.com](http://www.kerux.com).

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:7.

essence of the old. It is dead. “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”<sup>6</sup> We call it original sin or inherited sin. It is the sin we are guilty of from the moment of our conception.<sup>7</sup> It is who we are when we are born. To my wife, every baby is adorable. To God, every baby is a dead, blind, hateful, enemy.

What can a dead deer on the side of the road do? Nothing. It can only rot. From the moment of our birth into this life of death, we rot. The stench of the old is smelled in hatred, selfishness, self-centeredness, jealousy, rage and countless other sinful attitudes and actions. That’s the old.

## ROOTED IN JUSTIFICATION – THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

But thanks be to God! “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.”<sup>8</sup> We were dead. God made us alive. Here is the essence of the new. It is spiritual and eternal life. And it is completely, totally the work of God alone. “We have no life to live as Christians that is not given by God the Father, earned by God the Son, and bestowed by God the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

That’s why Jesus calls it a new birth. Remember the discussion he had with Nicodemus one night. Jesus told him, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”<sup>10</sup> Do you remember Nicodemus’ confused answer? He talked about a man going back to his mother’s womb. Rebirth didn’t make any sense to him because he focused on what he needed to do to accomplish it. That’s the mistake so many make about being new. That’s why so many don’t understand baptism, especially infant baptism. But what did Jesus say? “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”<sup>11</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh. Old gives birth to old. Just as much as a dog gives birth to a dog and can never give birth to a cat, so old gives birth to old and can never give birth to new. Spirit gives birth to spirit. That is, Life gives birth to life. There is nothing that we must do; nothing that we can do. We don’t make ourselves physically alive and we can’t make ourselves spiritually alive. Only God can give life.

Life is a gift of God’s grace. Paul wrote, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”<sup>12</sup> Salvation is by grace alone. Life is by grace alone. So when we talk about living this new life, we always start at the cross of Jesus. Our life is rooted in justification, the declaration that we are not guilty before God because Jesus’ blood has washed away our sins. The forgiveness of our sins is the power that makes us alive and motivates our life. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”<sup>13</sup> Notice where he starts. He starts with who we are now that we are alive in Christ. Because God has made us alive in Christ, we are already holy. “It cannot be emphasized too strongly. That status is the reality. It is not a status yet to be earned or achieved. It is not a status that is merely potential, a possibility only gained by the best of us and not real until we get to heaven. No, it is ours by faith in him who loved us and gave himself for us. It is ours right now!”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 2:1.

<sup>7</sup> See Psalm 51:5.

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 2:13; see also Ephesians 2:1-10.

<sup>9</sup> Harold Senkbeil, “The Author and finisher of Our Faith” Good News, Vol. 2, no. 2, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> John 3:3.

<sup>11</sup> John 3:5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Colossians 3:12.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Deutschlander, The Theology of the Cross p. 144.

This life – won at the cross of Christ and begun in us through baptism – shows in what we say and do. The way a person dresses says a lot about him. If he wears jeans and cowboy boots, he is a cowboy, or at least, he thinks he is. If he wears a white coat and carries a stethoscope, he is a doctor. In Christ, we are already holy and dearly loved. Since that is who we are, we will want to dress in ways that show our holiness. We will want to dress in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Sanctification is always rooted in justification. Holy living is rooted at the cross. Holy living is rooted in understanding our status in Christ.

Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus is life.<sup>16</sup> Joined to him by faith, we are alive. That life bears fruit. This is sanctification. This is the new life. It is rooted in Jesus.

## CHALLENGES TO THE NEW LIFE

### THE HIDDEN LIFE: COLOSSIANS 3

Just as you can’t see the sap in a tree, so you can’t see the new life of Christ in us. It is hidden. We can’t see it; we can only believe it. We again turn to Paul’s letter to the Colossians. “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”<sup>17</sup> That life, started in us when we were born again of water and the Spirit,<sup>18</sup> will continue for eternity in heaven.

However, it is hidden – hidden with Christ in God. Our life is not in the food we eat, the house we call home, the friends we keep, the children, our vacations, our accomplishments, nor in the daily routines and ruts we find ourselves in. If you take from me my wife, my kids, my home, my food, my vacations, my accomplishments, my routines and my self-esteem, I will still be alive. Even if you try to take the life that is in my blood, I will still flourish with life. I live because the fountain of my life – the fountain of your life too – is in our Lord and Savior.<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther sang, “And take they our life, Goods, fame, child and wife, Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won; The Kingdom ours remaineth.”<sup>20</sup> Our life is not things. Life is Christ. God has given us life in Jesus, but that life is hidden because God is keeping it safe with him until we can unwrap it for ourselves.

This hidden life brings challenges to our Christian living. We are told we are new, but we see only old. We believe we have life, but we see only death. We look for fruits of the new life, but experience emptiness.

### WE ARE NOT THERE YET

Rooted in Jesus, shouldn’t it be fairly easy to live the new life we have in Christ? Many people think that our lives just need a rearranging of priorities or an adjustment to our life style. Follow ten basic principles and five insights

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<sup>15</sup> John 15:5.

<sup>16</sup> See John 14:6.

<sup>17</sup> Colossians 3:1-4.

<sup>18</sup> See John 3:5.

<sup>19</sup> David L. Roth.

<sup>20</sup> The Lutheran Hymnal, #262. Yes, I know it’s old school, but I like that translation better.

and three rules for living and you have it made, we are told. We try, but we still fail. Why is our life of sanctification so anemic? Why am I still struggling to live the life God wants me to live, that I want to live?

Is the problem with us? Maybe we are not as committed as we thought we were. “Maybe I’m a hypocrite,” we think. “Maybe, I’m not a Christian at all!”

Is the problem with Lutheran doctrine? With Lutheran liturgy? With the gospel? Maybe we need something new, something vibrant to wake us up to live the life that is ours in Christ!

“We keep missing that road because we keep fighting the wrong battles. The problem is always somebody else, we like to think. If our boss would just get off our back, we’d be a lot happier. If our spouse would lighten up, our life would be worth living. If our circumstances would change, we’d be less angry and bitter.

“We even use the same line of thinking in our relationship with God. We’re convinced we could straighten ourselves out if only we didn’t have to contend with the temptation around us. If we could just clean up the moral cesspool we live in, we’re sure we could live God-pleasing lives.

“But nothing could be farther from the truth. The Bible makes it clear that our predicament is not the situation we live in, but what lives in us.”<sup>21</sup>

Instead of looking at the problem in us, we blame the liturgy or the preaching or stale doctrine. It’s not Lutheran liturgy, Lutheran preaching or Lutheran doctrine that’s the problem. And it certainly is not the gospel. The problem is in us. The problem is that we carry a corpse with us.

## WE CARRY A CORPSE WITH US

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?<sup>22</sup>

Our wretched lives come from a wretched man still with us. Yes, we are new. But the old still hangs around our necks like the albatross of the ancient mariner.<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther taught that we are both sinner and saint all at the same time. We are sinners, born completely corrupted by sin. We are saints, washed clean in the blood of Christ by faith. This dual nature of the Christian is not understood properly in most of Christianity. Only Lutheran

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<sup>21</sup> Harold Senkbeil, *Dying to Live*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 7:15-24.

<sup>23</sup> “The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge tells the story of a ship wandering the oceans because the old mariner had killed an albatross, a symbol of good luck to sailors. He was forced to wear the dead bird around his neck.

theology recognizes the true psychology of the believer. Only Lutheran theology recognizes the full status that we have before God by faith. Only Lutheran theology also recognizes the depth of the corruption of the old man that still clings to us.

Though drowned in the waters of baptism, the old man is still part of our lives because, Martin Luther once said, “The bugger can swim.” So he is still with us. We wake up with him in the morning and go to bed with him at night. He is there to distract our worship in church and to keep us from our prayers. He is with us working and playing, eating and drinking and he asserts himself into our relationships. The result is that I, along with Paul, don’t understand what I do. I sin. I sin again. I fail to live the new life that I am supposed to live. What wretched people we all are. That’s why principles, insights and rules for living won’t cut it. “It’s fruitless to go on tinkering with our life style, trying to transform it into conformity with God’s will on our own. When you operate on a corpse you don’t heal, you only discover the cause of death.”<sup>24</sup> You can’t educate this old corpse. You can’t reform it, discipline it or change it. And you certainly can’t make it alive. All you can do is put it to death.

### IT IS LIVED UNDER THE CROSS

Several years ago, a lady enrolled her children in our school at the invitation of a member. She joined our Bible Information Class but her heart wasn’t really in it. She was giving Christianity one, last try. She had been involved with a couple different Evangelical<sup>25</sup> churches in the area and she had the same results wherever she went. Her life was a mess. Her family was a mess. Her marriage was a mess. The Evangelical community left her with the impression that it was her fault; she hadn’t really committed her life to Jesus. In her mind, she thought she was a Christian. She believed she was a believer, but all the evidence in her life and the teachings of the Evangelical churches she attended suggested differently. She wasn’t doing something right and so she had despaired of life in Christ.

About the third lesson of our class as we talked about the complete forgiveness we have in the cross of Jesus Christ, she shouted out, “That’s it?” And starting with that class to the end of the course she cried every day. She cried because it was the first time in her life she heard the gospel of free grace in Christ. It was the first time she felt the burden of guilt lifted off her shoulders. She was forgiven. Her life was still a mess, but she was forgiven. She was a Christian even if her life wasn’t always a success. She was a Christian living under the cross.

“The cross of Christ cuts two ways, since it is a matter of both life and death. First, it means the life of Jesus Christ in exchange for death. Therefore His cross is our joy and hope. But the cross that brings us the life of Christ also means the death of our sinful nature. And death is never a pleasant experience. Through hardship and affliction, our Lord leads us to take a hard look at our sin, which means He leads us to sorrow and repentance.”<sup>26</sup>

The cross is not optional for the Christian. It is, in fact, the essence of the new life. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”<sup>27</sup> Following Jesus means taking up our cross. The cross is heavy and painful. It is painful because the essence of cross-bearing is self-denial. But that is

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<sup>24</sup> Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> Evangelical is a broad term to speak about churches who have arisen from conservative Protestantism. It is difficult to define one doctrinal position of Evangelicals today. Harold Senkbeil wrote “To be Evangelical in America today is largely a question of mindset and style of personal piety. Evangelical identity is established more on the basis of which books are read, which religious terms are laced into conversation, and what language is used in public prayer than on what specific doctrines are believed.” (Sanctification: Christ in Action, p. 13)

<sup>26</sup> Senkbeil, Dying to Live, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Mark 8:34-35.

why we want to take up our cross. “The new man rejoices in the cross, sees it as a powerful tool for beating back the never-finished assaults of the old man who remains wedded to the adulterous and sinful generation.”<sup>28</sup> Our crosses help us to deny self, that is, to put to death the old man with his passions and desires. Where there is death, there is pain. The old man hates the cross with its pain; the new man embraces and rejoices in the cross. New living is self-denial through embracing the cross.

## FEATURES OF THE NEW LIFE

### THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE

For this reason the new life also must be a sacramental life. In order for the new man to live, the old must continually die. That’s what happened at baptism. The Apostle Paul wrote:

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”<sup>29</sup>

In baptism there is a dying and a rising. It is the death of the old man and the coming to life of the new man. From that point on, we are continually putting off or dying to the old man. To do that we need to return to our baptism.

Here is where the influence of Evangelical teaching is most sharply felt. Evangelicals see sacramental churches as dead churches that rely on outward acts. They believe that going through the motions of church rites doesn’t help the Christian faith and life. They argue that to really live the Christian life, you need to be excited and moved from within. Influenced by Evangelicalism, we are tempted to look for the sacraments to move us, to excite us, to change us visibly. But when we baptize a baby, no halo appears. The child was crying before the baptism and kept crying after the baptism. We walk away from the Lord’s Supper, often feeling no different than we did before we received the bread and wine. We begin to believe that hearing the word and receiving the sacraments are just outward acts. Unable to see what we can only believe, we are tempted to look inside ourselves for assurance of our faith and power for Christian living. And that’s where we go wrong.

“Human willpower is notoriously anemic and fickle. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, is firm, steady, and sure. I wonder – do you suppose the reason you and I have such a hard time living the Christian life is that we try to go it alone, apart from our baptism into Christ? Baptismal renewal happens as we confess our sins and return in repentance to the forgiveness of sins we first received in baptism. . . . The ancient church described baptized believers as fish, conceived in water, born to swim in water. And you know what happens to fish out of water.”<sup>30</sup>

So we continue to go back to the water. The Christian life lived under the cross is a life of self-denial. We deny self by returning to our baptism in repentance. Hearing the word and receiving the sacrament can become merely outward acts, if we are not interested in putting off the old man. If we are more interested in embracing self rather than denying self, we will just go through the motions of worship. But if we really are interested in putting off the old man, we will return to our baptism daily by laying our sins before God in repentance.

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<sup>28</sup> Daniel Deutschlander, The Theology of the Cross p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 6:3-6.

<sup>30</sup> Senkbeil, Dying to Live, pp. 60-61.

“It’s fairly easy to say the words *I am a sinner*. It is quite another thing to confess our sin; that is, to lay it out openly before God in all its ugliness. That’s why we tend to hide our sin. Like Adam and Eve, we hide from God in shame. ‘*I was afraid,*’ Adam said, ‘*because I was naked; and so I hid myself.*’ But God is not ashamed of the nakedness of our sin. Remember, Jesus Christ joyfully embraced our shame on the cross so that he could remove it forever. And so there is no shame in sin confessed, no matter how ugly it may be. The only real shame is in trying to live with all that ugliness inside.”<sup>31</sup>

We can’t live the new, if we are not putting to death the old. We can’t reform, change or improve the old man. We can only kill him. When we kill him, we live. Jesus said, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”<sup>32</sup> New life begins at baptism. It survives by staying in the water and returning to baptism every day.

Along with a regular return to baptism, God’s Word is necessary for the new life. “God uses two realities . . . In his Word he reminds us repeatedly of the reality of our glorious status. . . . And so the obvious weakness that we see and feel, our temptations, our recurring guilt, and even our doubts are set on the other side; they help us to do battle against pride and arrogance. . . . Because of the need for this balance . . . the Word must be our indispensable and constant companion.”<sup>33</sup> When we cut ourselves off from God’s Word, we either fall to pride or despair. God’s Word keeps us balanced by the law which keeps our sins before us and the gospel which constantly reminds us of our status as holy, dearly loved saints.

That’s also why the Lord’s Supper is such an important part of the Christian’s life. Living under the cross, we come forward with our sins, our guilt, our failings. Unworthy though we are as we stand before Christ, he gives us his body and blood to assure us that we are forgiven. We are at peace with God. There is no sin standing between us and God anymore. With his body and blood he reaches out to us personally to tell us that each of us matters to him and to remind us that we are holy, dearly loved children.

## IT IS GUIDED BY THE LAW

That status proclaimed in the gospel of Word and Sacrament would be all we need, were it not for the old man still hanging around our neck. He confuses us, distracts us and misleads us. So we also use the law of God’s Word to guide our new life. God’s law, the example of Bible characters and the example of other Christians show us what the new life should look like. God’s Word gives us specific directions for living the new life. For example, it states guidelines for giving (1 Corinthians 8 and 9); defines love in action (1 Corinthians 13); directs the roles of husband and wife in marriage (Ephesians 5); and teaches the proper attitude toward parents (Ephesians 6) and others in authority (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). That is just a sampling.

Besides the direct commands of God’s word, we are also encouraged to benefit from the fellowship of the Church. Paul urged, “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”<sup>34</sup> In our fiercely independent culture, we too often try to go it alone. It’s not wrong to identify someone whose Christian life you admire and try to emulate them: your father or mother, a sibling, Pastor Berg, Pastor Ericson or Tim Tebow.<sup>35</sup> We should also remember the Lutheran teaching of vocation and

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<sup>31</sup> Senkbeil, [Dying to Live](#), p. 87.

<sup>32</sup> Mark 8:35.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Deutschlander, [The Theology of the Cross](#) p. 152.

<sup>34</sup> Philippians 3:17.

<sup>35</sup> Being a Denver Bronco fan, I just had to put him in here. Don’t emulate his doctrine, however.

remember that God has placed us in different jobs, homes and families. Each of those gives us particular ways in which we can do those good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do.<sup>36</sup>

Living the new life we have in Christ isn't really that complicated. Dr. John Brug puts it very simply:

"First, read Paul's epistles. Second, read Paul's epistles. Third, read Paul's epistles. If the concept is still not clear, repeat steps 1 to 3 as often as necessary.

"Paul's basic method is pretty straight-forward: 1) Preach the gospel. 2) Give specific concrete moral directives, relevant to the experience and station of his hearers. It does not get much more complicated than that.

"His method is quite a contrast to the sanctification handbooks which flood Christian bookstores. Paul doesn't focus on sentimental testimonials about how to achieve a satisfying relationship with Jesus. He offers no magic list of 'keys,' 'secrets,' and 'steps' to achieve true spirituality (with a few Bible passages thrown in, along with some charts and diagrams to guide you through the maze). He does not promise spiritual growth if you follow the right psychological techniques of positive thinking. The heart of his method boils down to this – he preaches the gospel, he preaches the law. Everything else is secondary and peripheral."<sup>37</sup>

## THE BATTLEGROUND OF PRAYER

One of the most overlooked tools for Christian living is prayer. Perhaps, it is because we go about prayer in the wrong way. We pray to God for an answer. We want God to speak to us, guide us, or give us a sign. But God has already spoken to us in his Word. "This puts prayer in a whole different light. Whenever we pray expecting God to speak to us, we will be disappointed. He has already done that; he has given us his Word: 'In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son' (Hebrews 1:2). If we ask for something more we're actually rejecting his Word and promise."<sup>38</sup> Instead of using prayer as the celestial shopping cart, let's use prayer as the battleground against Satan, the world and our own sinful nature.

Our battle is the struggle to deny ourselves and to take up our cross and follow Jesus. Prayer is where we cling to God for blessing as we struggle against the old man and strive to deny ourselves. Let's use prayer as a weapon in our struggle to live the new life.

## DIFFERING VIEWS OF THE NEW LIFE

### EVANGELICALS NEED GOOD WORKS FOR PROOF OF THEIR CONVERSION

Every false teaching about the new life of sanctification is rooted in trying to find life on our own. Remember, the old man hates God because he wants to find life apart from God and gets frustrated because there is no way to life apart from God. Whether it's the "do good works to earn salvation" of Roman Catholicism or the "deciding to accept Jesus into my heart" of the Evangelical, they are all rooted in the old man's desire to find life apart from God.

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<sup>36</sup> See Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>37</sup> John Brug, "The Lutheran Doctrine of Sanctification and its Rivals" Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly Volume 101, no. 3, p. 204.

<sup>38</sup> Harold Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action, pp. 144-145.

Only Lutheranism fully grasps the total corruption of original sin. Evangelicals, who reject original sin, don't recognize how deep is the corruption of human nature. Not recognizing the depth of our corruption, modern Evangelicals also don't grasp the completeness and power of the gospel. "Modern Evangelicals . . . do not see the gospel as the means of applying the love of God to the sinner as much as they see it as information about the love of God. The gospel is understood to be an 'offer of grace,' rather than the 'application of grace.' It has no power itself, the power is in your decision to accept it."<sup>39</sup>

This has a profound impact on their teachings about Christian living. Not accepting the corruption of original sin, they teach that man has the power in himself to bring about the kind of life that God desires. From that point of view, all we need are the right principles, insights and rules for Christian living. So Evangelical worship emphasizes emotionally uplifting music, insights into human psychology and some rules for living victoriously. The emphasis is taken off of Christ, his word and his sacraments. The emphasis is shifted to your abilities and what's in your heart. Take this example from Joel Osteen:

"When God created you, He put in you everything you need to fulfill your destiny. You have the talent, the creativity, the ideas. You are full of discipline, focus and self-control. You have strength, determination and resolve. The Creator of the universe has crowned you with His favor. If you're going to live a victorious life, you have to see yourself as a no-lack person. The way you see yourself will determine what kind of life you live."<sup>40</sup>

Notice that there is no hint of a sinful nature and no mention of Christ. It is all focused on man's own, inbred abilities. This is also why Joel Osteen is so popular. This false teaching is nothing more than telling the old, dead man to find life apart from God. While hidden under Christian terminology, it is telling people that they can, on their own, live the victorious life. There is nothing here of putting off the old man, or repentance, of needing a Savior and living under the cross. This appeals to our old man because it allows him to think that he can find life apart from God.

Evangelical teaching turns everything upside down. The Bible teaches that we have life by grace. Since we are made alive in Christ, we now live new lives (although imperfectly because of the sinful nature still clinging to us). Evangelical teaching would direct us to our own power to decide to believe and then to decide to live the new life.

"The decision of faith results in the assurance of God's mercy. 'The person with a servant's heart . . . is promised a place in Christ's kingdom' (Charles Swindoll, Improving Your Serve, p. 102). ' . . . this reward [the imperishable crown] will be awarded those believers who consistently bring the flesh under the Holy Spirit's control, refusing to be enslaved by their sinful nature' (Swindoll, Improving Your Serve, p. 205)."<sup>41</sup>

As Lutherans, we find our certainty of salvation in the cross of Jesus. "Jesus died for me" is enough for us. Since Evangelicals believe the gospel is only an offer of forgiveness, they must look inside themselves for the certainty of their salvation. They must ask themselves, "Have I acted on God's offer?" From an Evangelical point of view, then, Christian living is where they find the certainty of salvation. "In our subjective age, the lure of this approach to Christian certainty cannot be underestimated. In the emotional peaks of spiritual experience, today's American

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<sup>39</sup> Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> "#524, *You are a No-Lack Person* at [www.joelosteen.com](http://www.joelosteen.com). This may be taken out of context since it is the only quote I could pull off the website without making "an investment in this ministry."

<sup>41</sup> Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action, p. 60.

Christian finds convincing proof of the reality of God. . . He has found a new evidential base for a faith that seems to have no other foundation in our hostile world: his own feelings.”<sup>42</sup>

This also becomes the measure of a church. As Lutherans, we measure a church by its faithfulness to God’s Word. The Evangelical, on the other hand, measures a church by its effectiveness in bringing about the feelings of God’s presence and a change in the life of its people. “The credibility of the church rests on the changed lives of its people, thus only the praise-filled experience of God’s presence and power is the answer to today’s experience of insecurity and uncertainty.”<sup>43</sup> The Evangelical measures the spirituality of an experience not by Scripture, but by emotions and the feeling of God’s presence. They are continually looking for these things as evidence of spiritual life.

The wealth of books from Christian bookstores and the influence of Christian radio have impacted the thinking even of Lutherans. Instead of looking at the objective word of God and the cross of Jesus Christ, we are tempted to look inward at our emotions and feelings. We are tempted to base the certainty of our salvation on our Christian living. But any faith built on our abilities, emotions or efforts at Christian living is a faith built on shifting sand. Such teachings are destructive to faith. And they have come full circle right back to Roman Catholicism.

## CATHOLICS NEED GOOD WORKS TO EARN SALVATION

Like Evangelicals, Roman Catholicism does not recognize the seriousness of the fall and the total corruption of the old man. Therefore, it also teaches that man earns salvation by his efforts. Here is one quote from their catechism: “Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity [love], *we can then merit* for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God’s wisdom.”<sup>44</sup> Notice that the new life of sanctification merits eternal life and God’s blessings in this life. This has the same appeal of Evangelicalism. It is that age old appeal to the old man who wants to find life apart from God.

## WHY DO WE WANT TO LIVE THE NEW LIFE?

### THE GLORY OF GOD

If we don’t live the new life to give us certainty of our salvation or to earn God’s blessings, why should we strive to live the new life we have in Christ?

As Lutherans we believe in salvation by grace alone through faith without good works. “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”<sup>45</sup> Properly so, we have been intent on preserving this central teaching of the Bible. But have we gone too far? “Lutherans are often charged with neglecting the subject of sanctification, while giving entirely too much attention to justification. We are accused of speaking too much about creeds and too little about deeds.”<sup>46</sup> Have we so denigrated good works that Lutheran Christians have come to believe it doesn’t matter how they live, as long as they believe? This is not a new question. Soon after Martin Luther’s death, the question arose, “Are good works necessary for salvation?” Some said yes, that no believer can

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<sup>42</sup> Senkbeil, Sanctification: Christ in Action, p. 122.

<sup>43</sup> Carter Lindberg, The Third Reformation? P. 180.

<sup>44</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Para. 2010, at <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s1c3a2.htm#III>.

<sup>45</sup> Romans 3:28.

<sup>46</sup> Roger L. Sommer, “Sanctification” The Abiding Word Vol. 2, p. 275.

be saved without doing good works. Others saw the danger in such statements but went so far as to say that good works are harmful for salvation.

The Formula of Concord stated the correct understanding about good works:

“We believe, teach, and confess that good works should be entirely excluded from the question about salvation, just as they are excluded from the article of justification before God. The apostle testifies with clear words when he writes as follows, ‘Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: . . . “Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin”’ (Romans 4:6-8). And again, ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast’ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We also believe, teach, and confess that all people, but especially those who are born again and renewed by the Holy Spirit are obligated to do good works (Ephesians 2:10).

In this sense the words *necessary*, *shall*, and *must* are used correctly and in a Christian way to describe the regenerate, and are in no way contrary to the form of sound words and speech.”<sup>47</sup>

Stated another way: good works are not necessary for salvation, but they are necessary. A sanctified, Christian life is not optional. “When the Lutherans say that the Christian performs good works freely, they mean that good works flow naturally from faith. They do not mean that the Christian sits back, muses, and then decides whether he will perform them. In Lutheran theology moral neutrality in the matter of good works is impossible.”<sup>48</sup>

We return to Jesus’ statement in John 15. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>49</sup> Notice that Jesus says we *will* bear much fruit. He didn’t say we *can*, *should* or *might*. He said we *will*. If we are in Christ by faith, we will bear fruit. We can’t claim to be connected to Christ by faith and not bear fruit. Such a faith is dead and a sham.<sup>50</sup>

So Christians will do good works. Why? We do good works to bring glory to God and serve others. Our good works are not focused on ourselves. We are not earning or proving anything by how we live our lives. The life of the new man is rooted in justification. Since we are already “chosen, holy and dearly loved”<sup>51</sup> in Christ, we live that out in our relationships with others, in our vocation in life and in our worship of God. Our goal is service, not sainthood. Our purpose is to bring glory to God, not to find the reality of God in my life.

There are two errors we can fall into: One is that we make the new life optional. The other is that we make the new life the assurance of our salvation in Christ. Both are wrong. As Lutherans our emphasis will still be on the status that we have in Christ as declared to us in the pages of Holy Scripture. We are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Rooted in his life and sacrifice for us, we have life. Through his word and sacraments we are made new. That new life will show in our daily lives. That is not optional. As long as we remain connected to the vine, we will bear fruit. Made new in Christ, we will live new lives.

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<sup>47</sup> Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article IV, para. 7-9; p. 501.

<sup>48</sup> David P Scaer, “Article IV: Good Works”, A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord, p. 166.

<sup>49</sup> John 15:5.

<sup>50</sup> See James 2.

<sup>51</sup> Colossians 3:12.

## CONCLUSION

“We look at our church and lament: attendance is sagging, contributions are lagging, the council’s feet are dragging, the membership is aging, and the ladies aid is raging.”<sup>52</sup> When we don’t see the results in our lives or in our churches that we think should be there, we are tempted to buy the magic beans of Evangelical style in exchange for Lutheran substance. Let’s remember that the results are up to God. We can’t manufacture Christian living in people anymore than we can create faith in people. That’s God’s realm, where he rules by his Word. Let’s trust his Word to work.

How can we do better at living the new life we have in Christ? There are no magic beans or quick solutions. Living the new life we have in Christ is a tedious job of denying ourselves as we take up our cross and follow Jesus. It is a life the old man hates, but the new man embraces. With word and sacrament let us continue to keep before our eyes the status we have in Christ. Then, alive in Christ and following his Word we will produce fruits. New in Christ, we will live new lives.

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<sup>52</sup> Lyle Lange, “Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions” p. 22.

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