

A Christian and the Law

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Introduction

For us as Christians, particularly as Lutheran Christians, there can be no doubt about the central, all-important position of the Gospel in the Scriptures, in our Christian preaching, in our believing. Apart from Christ, apart from the Gospel there is no salvation. That is so basic that no true Christian will ever gainsay it, so basic that it can never be stressed sufficiently.

We know, however, that God gave us also the Law in the Scriptures. Where does this fit into the picture for the Christian? What is the relationship of the Law to the Christian? That is a question that has been answered in various ways in the Church, and unless it is answered correctly, also the Gospel does not come to its full right. Only when Law and Gospel are properly united and properly distinguished in our teaching and preaching is the Word of God being used in its God-intended manner.

Some have answered the question about the Christian and his relationship to the Law by placing the Christian for all practical purposes again under the Law. This is *legalism*. The Christian's whole relationship to God is determined by law. The Law is called upon to accomplish what the Gospel is to do and alone can do; in fact, the Gospel is made into law. The prime example of this we have in the Roman Catholic Church. Salvation no longer is viewed as being ours by grace alone through faith, but man's works are involved in gaining salvation. Sanctification, the Christian life, instead of being a fruit of faith, becomes the means of salvation. The Sacraments are changed from means of grace, with God giving us gifts, to works of obedience, or sacrifices brought to gain salvation. Not the Gospel, but the Law becomes the motivating power in the Christian life. You do the will of God because the Law says you must, not because the love of God constrains you. Legalism, and its close companion moralism, is destructive of faith, of salvation. In legalism, while lip service is paid to the Gospel, the Law in effect replaces it.

The other extreme position in regard to the Christian and the Law that found its way into the Church and threatened also Lutheranism already during Luther's life and in the years that followed is known as *antinomianism*. The chief exponent of this was John Agricola. In 1527 Melancthon had drawn up visitation articles that were to be used in Saxony for a visitation of the Lutheran churches. In these articles he advised that the pastors should preach the Law to produce repentance. Agricola criticized this. Not the Law, but the Gospel leads to repentance, was his contention. Although Luther effectively opposed this and Agricola had to yield, finally leaving Wittenberg, Agricola's antinomianism was revived in 1556 by a number of pastors in Erfurt and Nordhausen.

In reality there were two kinds of antinomianism. The more extreme form rejected the Law completely, also as means to effect contrition in unbelievers. Only the Gospel is to be preached, also to the unrepentant, unbelieving sinners. Others didn't go this far. They recognized the need for the Law in bringing the unrepentant sinner to repentance, but they denied that it should be preached any longer to the Christian. It had no value in guiding the Christian in his life of good works, according to their view. At times it was said that the Law belongs in the courthouse, not in the church, or that the Law belonged to the kingdom of Moses and the pope and so must be abandoned by true Christianity.

It was the antinomian controversy that resulted in two articles in the *Formula of Concord*, this latest of our Lutheran Confessions, completed in 1577 and included in the *Book of Concord* in 1580. Article V is entitled "Of the Law and the Gospel." This directed itself particularly against the extreme form of antinomianism, which failed to recognize the Law's function in bringing men to repentance. Article VI, "Of the Third Use of the Law," addresses itself to the other kind of antinomianism and concerns itself with the use of the Law for the Christian. In the course of our paper we shall refer repeatedly to these two articles, particularly to Article VI.

We do this, however, not thereby to replace Scripture in our study. We always first need to turn to Scripture to find out what it says. Then we go to our Confessions and rejoice to find in them the truth of Scripture correctly expounded and presented. Thus we gain added assurance for our subscription to these Confessions, to which we cling because we are convinced that they do present Scripture doctrine faithfully.

We entitle our paper “A Christian and the Law.” We have chosen this rather than the title, “The Third Use of the Law,” because the latter might be understood in a more restricted sense than we desire. We have divided our study into three parts.

- I. The nature of the Christian person.
- II. The origin, nature, and purpose of the Law.
- III. The relationship of the Law to the Christian person.

I.

If we are to understand the relationship of the Law to the Christian, we must keep in mind the nature of a Christian person. First, then, we shall take a closer look at the Christian as he is pictured to us in the Scriptures. That picture is also a good description of us. The Bible is a practical book. Here God, who is our Creator, who searches the hearts, who knows man better than we know ourselves, tells us what a Christian person is, reveals to us the nature of the Christian.

The Christian is a new man, reborn, a saint, free from sin, delighting to do the will of God.

“If any man be in Christ,” writes the Apostle Paul, “he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17). Also to the Colossians Paul points out that “ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (3:9, 10). So the Christian is a new creature, something new God has brought into existence. This, of course, has no reference to anything material, to our body, the physical substance of which we are made. But the old man has been put away, the old man who was sold under sin, and a new man is within us. This new man consists of God’s image restored in man, the image that was lost through sin. Ezekiel describes this as receiving a new spirit or heart. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you” (Ezek. 36:26, 27). As Christians were are a new creation of God, brought into being when God the Holy Spirit changed our hearts from the deadness of sin, from stone, to something living. This happened in us when we were brought to faith in Jesus Christ and His work of redemption.

This is also described by Scripture as a new birth, a rebirth, or regeneration. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” Jesus told Nicodemus (John 3:3), and explained this being born again as being “born of water and of the Spirit” (3:5). St. John calls this being “born of God.” This is not something that happened through our natural birth from our human mothers. That could only bring a child born in the image of sinful man into the world. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. But God has brought it about that we have been also reborn; the Holy Spirit effects new life in us through the Gospel as it comes to us in His Word and in the Sacraments. And so it happened that the image of God was renewed in us so that we now are created in the likeness of our heavenly Father.

That makes us saints. That is what the Christians are called. Again and again in his letters St. Paul addressed the believers to whom he is writing as “saints.” He writes “to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7); again, “to the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (I Cor. 1:2); again, “to the saints which are at Ephesus” (Eph. 1:1); or, “to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi” (Phil. 1:1). These saints are those that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, those who have been cleansed from sin through faith in Jesus Christ and His cleansing blood. They are the ones who find in Jesus, in His blood and righteousness, their beauty and their glorious dress. Arrayed in these, amidst the flaming worlds of judgment day, they can joyously lift up their heads before God. Truly, who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect, for God is the one who has justified them for the sake of Jesus’

death? There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1), indeed, they are saints—free from sin through Christ.

This new man, this reborn saint, is one who now delights to do the will of that God whom he loves. It is the new man in Paul that speaks in the seventh chapter of Romans when Paul says: “To will is present with me ...” (vs. 18), when he speaks of “the good that I would” (vs. 19). The new man in Paul says: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (vs. 22). Because he has a renewed mind Paul can say: “With the mind I myself serve the law of God” (vs. 25). In Paul, the saint, the reborn child of God, there was one will, namely, to do God’s commands; one delight, the law of God; one mind, to serve God. As God spoke through Jeremiah, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (31:33). He continues: “but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (32:40). This is the man of whom the Psalmist writes: “But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (1:2). This is the good tree of whom our Savior said that it brings forth good fruit (Matt. 7:17). He now has the mind of God, the mind of Christ.

So of the new man in us it now is true: whatever God wants, we want. If God tells us that we are to love Him above all things, that is exactly what the new man in us also wishes to do and does. When he is told that he should not abuse God’s name, swear falsely by it, or curse, the new man gives complete approval to that. When he hears God tell him to live a chaste and decent life, he himself desires no other. His whole mind is set on helping and befriending his neighbor in every bodily need, for he knows that this is the will of his God. When he is told not to misuse his tongue, not to speak evil of others, to put the best construction on everything, this command strikes a responsive chord in the Christian’s heart. When God tells him that he should devote himself to His Word, that he is to assemble with his fellow Christians for worship, that’s exactly what he wants to do, and he finds great pleasure in it. When God bids him be His messenger to the ends of the earth, when he is called upon to bring gifts to carry on the Lord’s work, he wholeheartedly agrees and finds that that is exactly what he wants. There isn’t one thing that the Lord commands, there is not anything that approaches the new man as God’s will that does not meet with the complete approval of that new man. It cannot be otherwise, for he is born of God.

Perhaps you will be saying by now: But this is not the way I find Christians to be. If that is the way Christians are, then I’m not one, and I don’t know any. But let us not be too hasty in saying this. Isn’t it true that when God comes to us and states what His will is, it will strike a responsive chord in our hearts; that when Christians are asked to do the Lord’s work, they do respond? If this were not true, then the work of the Church would have ceased long ago.

And yet, there is truth in the above objection. We haven’t found anyone who is exclusively the way the Christian according to the new man is described in the Bible. And surely none of us would claim to measure up to this description one hundred per cent. You must remember, this is only part of the description of the Christian *person*. This too must be recognized if we are to understand the Christian and also the relationship of the Law to the Christian. The above description of a Christian is one that pictures him the way he will be when he is in heaven. But this side of heaven there is a second important factor that unfortunately must be reckoned with when we describe the Christian person.

That is this: the Christian still has an old Adam, his flesh, which is sinful, corrupt, in which is nothing good, which is at enmity with God, and contends against the new man in the Christian.

The term “flesh” as used in the Scriptures has various meanings. But here we are speaking of “flesh” in the sense of “human nature considered as unregenerate and un sanctified.” This is man as he is by nature, “flesh born of flesh,” as Jesus calls him (John 3:6). This flesh is often referred to as the old man, or the old Adam.

The description God gives of this flesh is not a pleasing one to consider. It is completely corrupt. Paul says, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). No good thing is a very comprehensive expression. The works of the flesh then also are entirely sinful, are in the service of sin and evil. This is the way they are described: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like” (Gal. 5:19–21). The description

St. Paul gives of natural man in the first chapter of Romans is familiar. We cannot here consider it, but in what a detailed manner it shows how completely man by nature is sold under sin, given to evil. What a miserable picture of man!

God recognized this as he looked upon man after the fall. His depravity increased until finally, before the flood, God said, “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years” (Gen. 6:3). Yes, God recognized that man was flesh, totally corrupt, so that he “saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). How striking again and damning is this “only evil continually” that is predicated of man, of flesh. “Only,” that is, all that is in man, and “continually”- thus, natural man is evil at all times. That is flesh.

This flesh opposes God. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). It is completely in the service of Satan, the great enemy of God, who says: “Yea, hath God said?” Satan said in opposition to the Word of God: “This shall not be unto thee.” So man’s flesh also considers the things of God foolishness.

What we need to remember is that this vile flesh, the old Adam, still is present in the Christian. On the one hand Scripture tells us that we have put off the old man; on the other hand it points out that he is still there and very much alive and active. St. Paul, this great Christian whose faith in and zeal for Christ and the Gospel we can only weakly imitate, still saw that “in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” He saw that in him there still was this completely wicked flesh. He had not as yet gotten rid of his old man completely.

And the point that St. Paul carried out then is the constant fight that is going on within him. This flesh that he still finds in himself is continually fighting against the new man in him. To the Galatians he wrote, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other” (5:17). How can it be otherwise when two so completely different men are dwelling together under one roof, indeed, are wrapped up together in one package, find themselves encased within the same skin. Constantly this old flesh of man is opposing the new man, the renewed heart and will of the Christian. How vividly St. Paul describes this for us in the seventh chapter of Romans! How well he portrays this dual nature that inheres in the Christian, the new man and the old flesh, in constant struggle. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil that I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:18–25). We shall keep this passage in mind and refer to it as we go along.

How true is this description of the Christian person also according to our own experience. Don’t we find the same thing constantly happening in ourselves? As Christians we surely desire what is good, want to do only what is pleasing to God. Yet, how constantly there is present in us also our flesh, and this hinders and corrupts every good intention, thought, motive, word, deed. That is the flesh in us, contending, and, it would appear, quite successfully, against the new man in us.

While we have described these two, the old man and the new man separately, we need, however, to remember that they are not two separate persons. They are two completely opposite natures, but both joined within us in one person. In the course of church history attempts were made to divide man in such a way that the old man was falsely identified with man’s body, and this body, man’s material being, was considered evil, and his spirit good. So it was a matter of the spirit fighting against the old sinful body. Salvation for man consisted in being redeemed, set free from the human body. The result was a twofold one. Some as a result would seek to destroy their body in a sense, to overcome it through living a very stern, ascetic life. They were against all physical pleasures, and only the simplest food was to be eaten and that only in small quantities. After all, you must get rid of your flesh, that is, your body, and set your spirit, which was the good in you, free. Others went to the other extreme and would live libertine lives, indulge in every form of vice, in order also to

destroy this old sinful body. The spirit was good, so you can abuse and do what you want to with this sinful body; that won't injure your spirit and it may help to get rid of the body. The main aim is to free the spirit from the body and through indulging the body you might help that along. This was, of course, an entirely wrong view of these two, the flesh and the spirit. You cannot divide man up in this way. The Christian is one person, and both the old and the new man are now living together, both involved in everything the Christian does. Note how St. Paul speaks that "in me dwelleth no good thing." Nothing good dwelled in Paul. He had to say "in me." It wasn't something outside himself. When Paul fails to do the good, he realizes that he must accept responsibility for it. He says, "the good that I would I do not." Paul uses "I" for both. I want the good. But I do the evil. He cannot separate the two in this world. They are ever present in him, the Christian person, simultaneously. The Christian is saint and sinner at the same time. For although we are reborn, and rebirth is not a partial thing, we are not fully renewed as yet; renewal is something that grows, increases, and will not be complete this side of eternity.

These two are working together so closely in us (not in the sense of cooperating) so that both are involved in everything we as Christians do. That is the point that Paul is making in the above quotation from Romans. Paul constantly desires the good, that is the new man in him. But present at all times also is his flesh, which corrupts everything he does. His good intentions and desires do not find perfect fulfillment. Paul finds a law, a principle in operation, present: "when I would do good, evil is present with me."

A few illustrations may help to show this working together of the new and the old man in everything we do as Christians. The new man in the Christian will desire to hear the Word of God regularly. And yet we all know what a struggle the new man often has in this. Sometimes the old man succeeds in actually keeping the Christian away from the Word and worship. But even when the new man wins out, the old man may still say: Look what a fine person you now are in going to hear God's Word. And immediately the element of pride or self-satisfaction has been injected into this good thing we are doing and sin is present, even in the good we are doing. The new man moves us to give a sizeable gift for charitable purposes. He finally succeeded in suppressing the opposition of the old man to this. But then the old man, our flesh, besmirches this good that we do with all kinds of impure motives and selfish hopes. I'll do this for others so that when I need help, others will help me. Drive carefully, which the new man should want to do, but the motivation is added, the life you save may be your own. You have played the part of a good Samaritan, but soon you are sorry the new man won out because you are deeply disappointed because the one you helped didn't give you sufficient credit for what you did, proved himself an unworthy recipient of your help. How regularly and in what many and subtle ways the old flesh in us again and again brings about the result that the good that I would I do not! How continuously the law of sin wars against the new man in us, bringing the element of sin into everything we do! In all the strivings of the new man in us evil is present and we are bringing forth nothing that in itself is completely pure as our new man would have it. In everything the Christian does, both are present and have their part, the spirit and flesh. That is why we will also cry out, as did St. Paul: "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" And daily we will turn to the triumphant answer that Paul could give in faith: "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord."

As we look at the passage in Romans, we, however, want to note one more point that becomes evident as we look at the Christian person, made up of the believer as well as flesh. St. Paul makes it evident that he, however, considers the new man as his true self. He does not deny that the other is there, powerfully present as yet, and that he is responsible for what that old man does. But note how St. Paul says: "I know that in me, but adds, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" and again he says, "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (vs. 20). In verse 17 he had said the same. Sin is ever present, but that is not his real self any more. He doesn't want sin to be there, he as a Christian is fighting against it. He really desires only what is good. Sin is like an evicted tenant, who, however, doesn't want to move out and makes trouble for the new resident. He doesn't have any right to be there anymore, but he is still fighting and opposing the rightful owner in all that he does. So the Christian realizes that his true self is the new man, but the old man, his flesh, doesn't want to move out. And he won't until we are delivered from the body of this death

fully in eternity. But in the meantime we will fight against him, giving him no rights, recognizing that our true self is the new man.

It is only when we understand what Scripture tells us about the dual nature of the Christian person that we will understand some of the statements of Scripture which otherwise appear as a contradiction. St. John, on the one hand says, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (I John 3:9). On the other hand, this same apostle two chapters earlier had said, “If we say that we have no sin [note that he is including himself], we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I John 1:8). We see that both statements are completely true, the one of the Christian as believing new man, the other of the Christian as he is in this world with his flesh still present. We shall also have to keep this in mind as we consider the relationship of the Law to the Christian person.

II.

To understand properly the relationship of the Law to the Christian we must also keep in mind the origin, nature, and purpose of the Law. This involves, of course, also a careful distinction between the Law and the Gospel.

What is the Law as to its essential nature? We think here particularly of the content of the Law. The Law is a revelation of the will of God. In the Law God is speaking. It is not something that developed, like a code of ethics that evolved over the centuries on the basis of social standards that man found acceptable. The Fifth Commandment did not arise because man in the course of the years saw that it would be much better for all of mankind if the life of man were protected. The Sixth Commandment did not arise because man decided to place certain restrictions upon natural desire, like the desire for food and drink, which could similarly without restriction be satisfied. The do’s and don’ts of the Law are not man-made. God is speaking and telling man what His will is concerning man’s conduct, and concerning his heart with its thoughts and desires. The Law begins with the words: “I am the Lord thy God, Thou shalt have no other gods.” We are reminded that it is the Lord God himself speaking in the Law, expressing His will to man. In some respects we can call it a revelation of God’s holiness and righteousness and justice, at least as it is to be reflected in the life and conduct of man. “Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). Man is to reflect the holiness of God in his being and life.

Our Confessions give expression to this essential nature of the Law. In the Formula of Concord we read: “We unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, in which the righteous, immutable will of God is revealed, what is to be the quality of man in his nature, thoughts, words, and works, in order that he may be pleasing and acceptable to God” (S.D. V, 17). Using the illustration of a mirror in a somewhat different sense from what we are usually accustomed to, the *Formula of Concord* says: “For the Law is a mirror in which the will of God, and what pleases Him, are exactly portrayed” (S.D. VI, 4). Look into the mirror of the Law and you see reflected the holy will of God as it pertains to man’s nature, heart, and life.

This Law was originally given to man in creation, written into his heart. Man had the perfect knowledge of God, complete and perfect knowledge of the will of God. This was involved in the image of God in which man was created. When St. Paul writes of the restoration of that image he bids us “put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10). To have the image of the Creator is to have the knowledge He gives, knowledge certainly also of the Law, the will of God. That knowledge Adam and Eve had. And they delighted in it; they followed it perfectly so that they were created after God “in righteousness and true holiness.”

This Law that was revealed to man, written originally in his heart, is in its very nature, being the will of God, perfect, holy, and good. St. Paul writes, “Wherefore the law is holy and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). A few verses later he also calls the Law “spiritual” (vs. 14).

And what was the original intent of God in giving man the Law? Paul writes, “And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death” (Rom. 7:10). The Law was ordained to life. The Lord spoke through Moses: “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live

in them: I am the Lord” (Lev. 18:4). When the lawyer came to Christ, asking: “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus directed him to the Law and said concerning it: “This do, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:25, 28). If Adam and Eve had continued in perfect obedience to God’s Law, they would have continued to live in a blessed fellowship with their God and Creator. The threat of death, the loss of life, was connected with the disobedience of God’s commands. But continuing in obedience, they would continue in life and in a blissful fellowship with the holy God.

This original intent of the Law, however, has completely changed - not that the Law as such has changed. The Law still is good; the Law still reveals the will of God. But the change was occasioned by man’s sin. The Law, approaching corrupted man, is not unto life. St. Paul writes, “And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death” (Rom. 7:10). Its purpose has changed; its effect is a different one. Instead of life, the Law brought death.

To illustrate this change, sugar is a food that is, in itself, something good. It is given for life. Used properly by the healthy, the purpose it serves, its intent, is for life. But what in itself may be good for a healthy person may be unto death to the one who is diabetic. Not the nature of the sugar has changed, but the subject to whom it is given; and this change, the sickness in the person, makes sugar have a different reaction in that person.

What now is the purpose and intent of the Law, originally given for life, now that man is corrupted, totally depraved? We read in Romans, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom. 7:7). Has the Law become sinful? This Paul rejects with the strong “God forbid.” Absolutely not! But now the Law serves to expose sin. “I had not known sin, but by the law.” “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20), as Paul had stated it earlier in the same letter. The example of St. Paul illustrates this well. Take the matter of lust, here used not only of sinful desire prohibited by the sixth commandment, but also of the many unlawful desires that arise in man’s heart. He refers particularly to the lust of coveting. Will man as he is by nature consider that sin? Isn’t it true that man in general, natural man, will not consider anything as sin until it has led to a sinful action? Merely to think evil, to desire, to covet, that to the world is not sin. With what revealing power the Law comes when it says, “Thou shalt not covet”! Now I know that even that desire in my heart already involves disobedience to God’s commandment. And disobedience to God’s commandment is sin, for “sin is the transgression of the law.”

While the Law continues to reveal the holy will of God, approaching the sinner, it now is a constant reminder that the will of God is being transgressed. If I am a citizen who never desires to travel faster than 65 miles an hour, the posted speed limit merely is a reminder to me that what I desire is also the desire of my government. I am in complete harmony with my government. But if I am driving 80 miles an hour and that is what I want, then each sign that reminds me of the government’s will is an earnest reminder that I am a transgressor. It reveals to me my sin. Until I see such a sign, I may travel 80 miles an hour, which is against the law, but believe that I am still within proper limits. But the sign will reveal my transgression to me, and each additional sign is a renewed reminder. Yes, the Law, and this is true in a general sense of all law, serves to reveal transgression. It serves this purpose because man is a sinner.

In fact, St. Paul in Romans 7 shows how the Law reveals the deep inner depravity of man, the hatred of God, the rebellious heart that now is a part of sinful man. He goes on to say, “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (vs. 8, 9). Note carefully Paul’s line of thought here and also the sense in which he speaks of being alive and dead.

Sin was dead in Paul without the Law. This does not speak of being dead in an absolute sense, nor in the sense in which Christians are called dead to sin. We could say, sin was dormant, it was sleeping. And so Paul appeared to be alive. For sin wasn’t showing itself and asserting itself openly and obnoxiously. This might well be the picture of natural man, as he appears when he is conducting himself quite correctly, following after civic righteousness. Sin seems to be sleeping; he appears to be alive.

But now the Law comes and asserts itself. The Law serves to bring to light, to awaken, enliven the slumbering, the seemingly dead sin in man. Paul points out that when the Law came with its commandments, then all manners of evil desires arose and showed themselves. His true sinful nature awakened was enlivened by means of the Law. The fact that something is forbidden makes it all the more desirable to natural man. Sometimes the Law is the match that lights the fuse to the powder of sin in man's heart. Sin is there, but often dormant, until you light the fuse. Then its presence becomes powerfully evident. So Paul goes on to say: "And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me" (vs. 10,11). Thus the Law not only exposes the sinful actions of man, but also exposes the depraved nature, which is at enmity with God, which sometimes may appear to be slumbering beneath a veneer of civic or self-righteousness and fail to be recognized. The Law brings it to light.

Luther points this out in the Smalcald Articles. He writes: "But the chief office or force of the Law is that it reveal original sin with all its fruits, and show man how very low his nature has fallen, and has become utterly corrupted He begins to be an enemy of God, and to murmur, etc. This is what Paul says, Romans 4:15: "The law worketh wrath." And Romans 5:20: "Sin is increased by the law" (A.S. III, ii, 4, 5). Luther in his Commentary on Galatians of 1519 illustrates this. He writes: "And, to put the matter before you by way of comparison, water is good; but when poured over lime it sets the lime on fire. Is it the fault of the water that the lime becomes hot? Indeed, the water convicts the lime, which was thought to be cold, by revealing what it has inside. Thus the Law incites lusts and hatreds, and exposes them; but it does not cure them."¹

With man having become a sinner, the full weight of the Law's threats also were felt by man. The threats of the Law mean nothing at all to him who is obedient. You ignore them. You do not feel them as repressive. For you they don't exist. But for the disobedient every threat has meaning. And so the threat of the Law, which declares that the soul that sinneth it shall die, that the wages of sin is death, because of sin has full applicability. Thus the Law becomes a coercive force. It drives and compels, for it threatens. It becomes a club, causing fear, compelling to at least a degree of enforced obedience. So St. Paul writes to Timothy (I Tim. 1:19):

"Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (I Tim 1:9, 10).

The Law must come in to compel the lawless and disobedient to at least a degree of obedience. If no one desired to take another person's property, then there would be no need for the Law to say: Thou shalt not steal. Nor does this commandment have anything to say to a person who has no desire for the property of his neighbor. But to the one who steals, or wants to steal, the Law comes and tells him that he dare not do so and threatens him with punishment if he disobeys. Thus the Law with its threats may keep the unlawful at least somewhat in check. This is the primary function which civil law serves. It is set up for that very purpose—to restrain. When a citizen does something that is harmful to the community, we soon hear it said: "There ought to be a law against that." We mean that the law ought to come in and restrain, prohibit the citizen from such an action. We recognize that as a function of law.

Also God's Law serves that purpose in a world of sin. Who knows how much freer and more open immorality would be were it not for the restraining influence of God's Law, a remnant of which still is present in the heart also of natural man! Paul speaks of this and its restraining effect upon unbelievers when he writes to the Romans:

"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law [not having it in written form as did the Jews], do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto

¹ *Luther's Works*, American Edition (St. Louis, 1964), Vol. 27, p. 276.

themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom. 2:14, 15).

Even Russia, which does not want to recognize the existence of God, has a sense of understanding for the 6th commandment. Khrushchev expressed displeasure with some of the overexposure of the female body that he witnessed in Hollywood when he was touring our country. You do find certain moral standards, even though they may be far from the requirements of the Decalog, among the most primitive peoples. This is the restraining influence of God’s Law.

We note then the change which sin brought about in regard to the nature and purpose of the Law. While to man in his original purity the Law was the revelation of God’s will with which the will of man, having the image of God, was in complete accord, and though the Law was given unto life, sin changed this completely. Now the Law was a fearful thing, exposing the disobedience of man, leading to knowledge of sin, which is so necessary, but also with its threats restraining depraved man, checking him, hanging like a club over him, forcing him to a degree of unwilling obedience. The content of the Law was the same, but its effect and purpose were completely different.

So that the Law, after the entrance of sin might more fully carry out its purpose, God at the time of Moses gave it in written form. With sin and the loss of the image of God the natural knowledge of God’s will also became less perfect. Not only does man fail to live according to the will of God, but he will tell himself that this failure is not really sin. This is what Paul means when he says that before the Law came he did not know lust. This was considered a perfectly natural, normal desire, not recognized as sin. The Law written in his heart no longer pointed to this as something wrong; but then, God in the Law as revealed through Moses came and said: “Thou shalt not covet,” and thereby again sharpened his understanding of the Law. Now coveting, this desire of the heart, this lust, was recognized as something God prohibits, and Paul describes man’s reaction to this prohibition. What we are interested in noting here is that through the Law as revealed by Moses the understanding of it was increased. The Jews externalized this revelation of God’s Law, and failed to see its full spiritual significance, which was a natural result of their unbelief. Christ again showed its deeper significance in the Sermon on the Mount. He explained that the Law not only forbids murder, an outward action; but also hatred, which is in the heart; not only the act of adultery, but desiring a woman in the heart; and not only the outward act of stealing, but coveting, which again is in the heart. Thus God, by revelation, has given us the Law and sharpened its understanding, so that it might more fully and completely serve its purpose over against the sinner, and might above all expose and condemn sin. As St. Paul writes: “Now we know what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). How effectively the Law of God, when properly used, carries out this function of stopping the mouths of sinners, showing them that they have no leg to stand on in the sight of God!

To sum up, the Law comes from God, and reveals His perfect will for the nature and life of man. It was written in man’s heart so that the knowledge of God’s Law and willing assent to it was a part of God’s image. Later it was given through Moses in written form. Originally it was ordained unto life, but over against the sinner it has the characteristics of coercing, threatening, condemning, and revealing sin.

III.

We proceed now to our third and final part, and this presents the chief point of this paper. We ask: What is the relationship of the Law to the Christian? To clarify this we point out that we are not considering the Law as it pertains simply to the unregenerate person. Nor are we viewing the Christian as he will be in eternity, when he is perfectly renewed, having the perfect image of God restored, as it was before the fall. But we are viewing the Christian person as he is now, as we found him described in the Scriptures in our first part. What relationship does the Law have to this Christian person, who is saint and sinner at one and the same time, who is regenerate, but still has an old Adam.

In considering this we shall follow what Article VI in the *Formula of Concord* confesses about this. This article addresses itself in particular to this point. Although it is entitled, “The Third Use of the Law,” which we usually limit to the Law serving as a guide to the Christian, it is more correct to say that it concerns itself with what we call the Christian and the Law, as we entitled our paper. It concerns itself with the purpose that the Law serves for the Christian as he now is, in his still imperfect state. That makes this article very practical for us, for it is in that state that we as Christians are now.

Scripture speaks clearly that the Christian as a new man, as reborn believer, is in no respect under the Law, but is completely free from the Law. St. Paul states this categorically in writing to Timothy when he says: “The law is not made for a righteous man.” For a righteous man there simply is no such thing as law. It has nothing to do with him; it has nothing to say to him. And the newborn Christian is a righteous man. Also our Savior tells us that through Him we become free. He told the Jews that believed in Him: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31, 32). Later He again affirmed: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Paul was very much concerned that this freedom, which Christ gained for the Christian, should not be lost. The Christian is not to permit himself to be placed under the Law again, as the Judaizers in Galatia sought to do. He calls out to them: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). Indeed, as Christians they are such who are led by the Spirit, and so he tells them: “If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” (Gal. 5:18).

Thus the *Formula of Concord* points out that “the truly believing and truly converted to God and justified Christians are liberated and made free from the *curse of the Law*” (S.D. VI, 4). Referring to I Timothy 1:9, which we quoted earlier, the *Formula* says: “But the meaning of St. Paul is that the Law cannot burden with its curse those who have been reconciled to God through Christ; nor must it vex the regenerate with its coercion, because they have pleasure in God’s Law after the inner man” (S.D. VI, 5). The new man is entirely outside the sphere of the Law’s demands and threats and coercion, for he delights in and wills the very things the Law calls for. The demand, Thou shalt not steal, or even, Thou shalt not covet, makes no demands whatsoever upon him who is in complete accord with that demand, who doesn’t have the least desire to steal, or even to covet, whose whole will and thinking and conduct agree with this. Rather, the new man finds pleasure in God’s revealed will, for he is in wholehearted accord with it. He loves God with all his heart, mind, and soul, and loves his neighbor as himself, and by this love the Law is perfectly fulfilled.

But while our Confessions point out that the Christian in no sense is *under* the Law, and note the preposition which is used, which points to the threats and coercion of the Law, they point out at the same time that Christians “should daily exercise themselves in the Law of the Lord” (S.D. VI, 4). St. Paul’s statement that “the law is not made for a righteous man” is “not to be understood in the bare meaning, that the justified are to live without law” (S.D. VI, 5). Since the content of the Law is God’s will, the whole life of the Christian corresponds to that Law. The Christian’s one concern is to do all things according to the will of God. But this will of God is not a coercive force, is not a threat. It is that wherein the Christian now walks with pleasure and delight. Note therefore the distinction that our Confessions make: The Christian is not *under* the Law, but exercises himself in the Law. But here law isn’t law *in* the ordinary sense in which we usually use the term, for we sinners can hardly think of it without its coercion and threats.

Let us briefly illustrate the distinction. Little Johnny is 10 years old. His father tells him to mow the lawn. He has no desire to do this. In fact, he would sooner not. But his father has given the command, and Johnny knows that his father means business. He fears the consequences of disobedience. So he mows the lawn, but he does so under the law of his father. It is under coercion. Now Johnny has grown up. He looks at the lawn and sees that it needs cutting. He wants to mow it, for he wants to see the beauty of the freshly cut lawn. So he does it. What he is doing he is doing again accordingly to the will of his father. But he is not doing it under his law, but yet is exercising himself in it. It isn’t because the law made demands that he mows the lawn; the father didn’t even have to tell him to mow it. He wanted to do it, and did it because he has the same will as his father regarding the lawn and it’s cutting.

In so far as the Christian is renewed, he needs no law whatsoever. He doesn't even have to be told what the will of God is, for his renewed will conforms completely to the will of God. Yes, if the Christian were completely new man, the Law would not be needed even as a guide or rule, for he would know God's will completely, he would not need to be taught it. The *Formula of Concord* says:

“If the believing and elect children of God were completely renewed in this life by the indwelling Spirit, so that in their nature and all its powers they were entirely free from sin, they would need no law, and hence no one to drive them either, but they would do of themselves, and altogether voluntarily, without any instruction, admonition, urging or driving of the Law, what they are in duty bound to do according to God's will” (S.D. VI, 6).

Note: There would be no need for the coercion of the Law, but also no need for its instruction. In heaven, where we shall be thus perfectly renewed, our Confessions point out, the Christian “will need neither the preaching of the Law nor its threatenings and punishments, as also the Gospel any longer” (S.D. VI, 24).

Prof. August Pieper, in a lengthy study of I Timothy 1, entitled *Dem Christen ist kein Gesetz gegeben*, “The Law Is not Made for a Righteous Man,” which appeared in *the Theologische Quartalschrift* and was reprinted in translation in 1960–61 in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, in his usual forceful and dramatic way speaks of this complete freedom of the Christian in so far as he is new man, believer, from the Law in every sense. We present a few quotations.

No law is laid upon the just, and that in absolutely no manner, neither as doctrine, as to *what* he should do, nor as demand, *that* he should do it, nor as punishment *for that* which he might have broken. Absolutely: *There is no such thing as law for the just.*²

According to the glorious Gospel of the grace of the blessed God, by faith in Christ we Christians are just in the fullest sense of the word: we are truly *dikaiōi*. Ergo! Thus we really are finished with all argumentation. No law concerns us Christians, not even the Law of God, given by Moses - and now we say that is really true. *The Law*, even this Law does not concern us Christians, does not concern us whatsoever either as doctrine, or as demand, or as curse.³

Prof. Pieper, however, explains in what sense this is true: “This is true of the Christian in so far as he is a Christian; something entirely different is true of the non-Christian and of the Christian in so far as he is flesh.”⁴

However, when we considered the nature of the Christian person as he now is, we noted that he never appears in this world in this perfect state. He never is completely new man, entirely regenerate. We said earlier that we are concerning ourselves here not with the Christian as he will be in eternity, but as he now is. That is the concern of Article VI of the *Formula of Concord*. There we read: “However, believers are not renewed in this life perfectly or completely; for although their sin is covered by the perfect obedience of Christ, so that it is not imputed to believers for condemnation, and also the mortification of the old Adam and the renewal in the spirit of their mind is begun through the Holy Ghost, nevertheless the old Adam clings to them still in their nature and all its internal and external powers” (S.D. VI, 7).

It is precisely because of this continuing presence of flesh, of the old Adam, in the Christian person that he needs to have the Law preached to him, yes, also the Law as guide and rule for Christian living. In so far as he is new man, he knows God's will and needs no instruction, but because of the flesh that still is present, his knowledge is still very imperfect, is often beclouded and becomes perverted and is misled. It is because of his flesh that he often does not fully know what God really wants of him. So we read in the *Formula of Concord*:

² *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, October, 1960, p. 256.

³ *Op. Cit.*, January, 1961, p. 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

“So, too, this doctrine of the Law is needful for believers, in order that they may not hit upon a holiness and devotion of their own, and under the pretext of the Spirit of God set up a self-chosen worship, without God’s Word and command, as it is written in Deuteronomy 12:8, 18, 32: ‘Ye shall not do ... every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes, etc., but observe and hear all these words which I command thee. Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish therefrom’” (S.D. VI, 20).

The point is this: The Christian in so far as he is new man wants to serve God and do entirely what is according to God’s will. But because he still is also flesh, he doesn’t know this will perfectly. If he depended upon himself to determine how properly to serve God, he would be influenced not only by his new man, but also by his flesh. He might hit upon a holiness entirely his own, one that would not be perfectly according to God’s will because his flesh had misguided him. But how can the Christian know when he does do God’s will? How is he to be prevented from devising his own holiness? The Law serves as a guide. The Law instructs him. He is not to let his flesh add to or diminish anything from it. While the new man is not under the Law, neither is he over it, that he can establish it, that he can change it, that he sets it up himself.

In this connection our Confessions often point to the self-chosen piety of the Roman Church. Instead of following the Law of God in determining what is truly God-pleasing, they have chosen to set up their own piety, have set it up as one that is even superior to what God says in his Law. Fasting, pilgrimages, celibacy, praying the rosary, and the like have been set up as particular works of piety, works that far surpass striving from the heart to live according to the Law. Such works, however, are not good works, since man has contrived them. God must tell us what is pleasing to him how our life is to be if it is to conform to His will. In Article IV, “Of Good Works,” the *Formula of Concord* therefore states: “And that truly good works are not those which every one contrives himself from a good intention, or which are done according to traditions of men, but those which God Himself has prescribed and commanded in His Word” (S.D. IV, 7). It is the Law, serving as a guide to the Christian because of his still imperfect knowledge of God’s will, which must instruct the Christian. This we usually refer to as the third use of the Law. Here we view Law in no sense according to its coercive force or with its threats. Here only the content of the Law comes into consideration, and its content is God’s will. The Christian needs to know the content of the Law, if his works are to be God-pleasing.

However, another point is stressed in this connection in the *Formula of Concord*, Article VI. We read: “For the Law says indeed that it is God’s will and command that we should walk in a new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin and do it” (S.D. VI, 11). Not one iota of the Law contributes anything by way of strength or renewing power so that a Christian will desire to or actually do anything according to the Law. How extremely important it is for us to remember this! As long as we operate solely with the Law, we cannot give anyone the power to do God’s will. And when they do out of coercion and threat follow the letter of the Law, they have only performed Law works, which still are sin in the sight of God. It is only through the Gospel that the Holy Spirit works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. The *Formula of Concord* says: “But the Holy Ghost, who is given and received, not through the Law, but through the preaching of the Gospel, Galatians 3:14, renews the heart. Thereafter the Holy Ghost employs the Law so as to teach the regenerate from it, and to point out and show them in the Ten Commandments what is the acceptable will of God” (S.D. VI, 11, 12).

To illustrate: A roadmap will show you very clearly what road your car must take in order to get from New York to Chicago, but unless there is gasoline in the tank, it will be unable to travel a single mile along that road. On the other hand, if the gasoline tank is filled and the car has power to travel, without the roadmap you may think you are driving to Chicago, but ultimately find yourself in Quebec or Miami. Only through the Gospel, the message of the free grace of God in Christ, does God impart to us the new heart that desires to do God’s will. Only through the Gospel do we receive the power and strength even to begin to follow it. However, lest our flesh misguide us, lest we in our state of still imperfect knowledge, do works that do not lie along the path of God’s will, the Holy Spirit through the Law instructs us more perfectly.

So we find the Apostle Paul addressing the Ephesian Christians as “saints,” as “faithful in Christ Jesus,” pointing out to them that they have redemption through Jesus’ blood, the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of His grace. Yes, they are such who are predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will, that they should be to the praise of His glory. To these saints of God he writes that they should walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called. He bids them be followers of God as dear children, and to walk in love, as Christ has loved them and given Himself for them as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. Paul instructs them in this walking as followers of God. That means avoiding fornication and all uncleanness, walking circumspectly. That means for wives that they submit themselves to their husbands, and for husbands that they love their wives with the kind of unselfish love that Christ showed for His church. For children this means that they obey their parents and for parents that they bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Do you notice how for Paul the basis of the appeal is the Gospel? That gives the reason for the new Christian life, the motivation. That gives the power and ability. But then he goes on by means of the Law to show wherein this new life will consist. A similar pattern we find in all of Paul’s Epistles. This relationship must be kept clear if we are to grow in Christian living. Each, Law and Gospel, must serve its particular function. We recognize, however, that here the Law is thought of as to its content, the will of God.

We dare not stop here, however, when speaking of the Christian person and the Law. We remember that it is the flesh that the Christian still has in him that makes necessary the preaching of the Law, even as a guide, as a means of instruction in the will of God. However, don’t forget, the flesh of the Christian is no different from the flesh of the unregenerate. Our old Adam isn’t of a different kind from that of the unbeliever. The old Adam of the believer no less than the old Adam of the unbeliever would like to kick over the traces, wants to go his own ways. Our Confessions call this old Adam “an intractable, refractory ass” (S.D. VI, 24). This stubborn old mule has to be whipped; he will obey only under coercion. This is the flesh that Paul sees in himself in which “dwelleth no good thing.” This flesh of the Christian must be kept in check. We read: “But as far as the old Adam is concerned, which still clings to them, he must be driven not only with the Law, but also with punishments; nevertheless he does everything against his will and under coercion, no less than the godless are driven and held in obedience by the threats of the Law” (S.D. VI, 19). In so far as the Christian is flesh, he needs the Law for exactly the same purpose as does the unregenerate who is all flesh, in whom the Holy Spirit has not effected regeneration. Threats, coercion, punishments are the only language which also the stubborn old Adam of the Christian understands.

This, however, must be recognized, that when the old Adam submits unwillingly to the coercion of the Law, this is not a God-pleasing work that proceeds from faith. This is not fruit of faith. This is not Christian sanctification. Its purpose is to maintain order and peace among men in the world. This is often called the civil use of the Law, or the first use. It is necessary so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in this world. This is where the government also enters into the picture, which has been given the function to enforce law and order upon natural man. Also in the home and school parents and teachers may need to resort to laying down the law and thus keeping the old Adam of their children in check. However, we need to remember that this is not producing fruits of faith in the children. We as Christians will not think that through this enforcing of the Law upon the stubborn old Adam we have produced the Christian life. What is extorted by means of threats and coercion is not a fruit of faith.

Yet the Christian, in so far as he has flesh, will also need to have this flesh coerced and threatened into submission to law and order. In fact, the new man in the Christian will wholeheartedly cooperate in coercing the old flesh into submission. This is a part of that struggle between the new man and his flesh of which St. Paul speaks in Romans 7 and about which we spoke in our first part.

One further important point needs to be kept in mind as we consider the Christian and the Law. This, too, involves the fact that the Christian is both new man and flesh at the same time, both saint and sinner. We pointed out that this means that everything the Christian does is still tainted with sin. No work of the Christian ever is the result only of the new man. Daily the Christian, also in his striving for good works, must confess his utter inability to please God. Here again, it is God’s Law that reveals to the Christian, too, his many and great

sins. It will be the Law that will reveal to the Christian where his sinful flesh led him astray. The Law with its “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not,” with its demands not only for the best effort, but for perfection, will again and again reveal the total lack of it. When St. Paul tells us: “By the law is the knowledge of sin,” this word applies equally to the Christian and the sin that still corrupts even the best efforts of his renewed will.

When the prophet confesses: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6), he is speaking not only of unbelieving mankind with its works of self-righteousness, but he is confessing this concerning himself and all his attempts to perform works of righteousness. Even the best efforts, also of the Christian, in the light of God’s perfect Law, are revealed as filthy rags. This will lead the Christian ever to continue to confess as he looks at his own works: We are as an unclean thing. This will strike down all thoughts of pride and self-glorification which may want to arise in the Christian’s heart when he actually succeeds in doing what he believes to be good. This will impress upon the Christian day in and day out that his only hope is in the free grace of God, in the redemption that comes by grace through Christ Jesus. This will make him realize day in and day out that not his life of sanctification makes him righteous in the eyes of God, but that his only hope is in the righteousness of Christ, in this perfect righteousness that by faith is credited, imputed to him. Yes, the Christian because of the fact that he is flesh needs the Law at all times also in its use as a mirror, the second use, that of revealing, exposing sin.

This also is stated in Article VI of the *Formula of Concord*. There we read:

“So, too, the doctrine of the Law, in and with the good works of the believers, is necessary for the reason that otherwise man can easily imagine that his work and life are entirely pure and perfect. But the Law of God prescribes to believers good works in this way, that it shows and indicates at the same time, as in a mirror, that in this life they are still imperfect and impure in us” (S.D. VI, 21).

Does this mean that a Christian never performs works pleasing to God? He does not, to be sure, in the sense of the work in itself being perfect. Our Confessions point out: “But the Gospel teaches that our spiritual offerings are acceptable to God through faith for Christ’s sake” (S.D. VI, 22). What is imperfect according to the Law becomes holy and acceptable to God through the Gospel, through faith in Christ. Through Him the many sins that still taint our works are removed so that our weak efforts at producing good fruit are acceptable to God and a sweet-smelling savor that rises into His holy presence. Thus the Law exposes sin, the Gospel cleanses what the Law has revealed.

We see that all three uses of the Law of which the *Formula of Concord* speaks are necessary because the Christian is not all new man, but is both believer and flesh. The preaching of the Law is needed because of his flesh.

Moreover, even as it is impossible to separate the Christian into two distinct parts, but the two are ever present together, thus also the various functions of the Law are served simultaneously. We cannot separate the one from the other. This the *Formula of Concord* indicates when we read: “But the Law of God prescribes to believers good works in this way, that it shows and indicates at the same time, as in a mirror, that in this life they are still imperfect and impure in us” (S.D. VI, 21). Even while the Law is instructing the Christian in what is pleasing to God, thus serving as a guide, it at the same time is revealing sin.

Let us illustrate this. A pastor may preach a sermon on the fourth commandment, using as his text Colossians 3:20, 21: “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” He points out to his Christian congregation what fruits of faith the Lord desires of them in their position in life as children, as parents. He is presenting to them the Law in its function as guide in Christian living, as also Paul was presenting it to the Colossians in his letter. But at the same time, that presentation of the Law will reveal to every child and to every parent present that he is failing to live up to this command of the Lord. By faith in Christ the Christian who hears this sermon will desire and strive to live up to what God calls for here, but at the same time he will see how his flesh is continually preventing him from successfully carrying out these desires of the new man. While we can

logically, in order to discuss the various functions of the Law, divide them and recognize how each addresses itself to man, and to the Christian, yet because the Christian cannot be divided between flesh and spirit, we cannot in practice completely divide them. If the Christian as a whole, as saint and sinner at the same time, is to be served, the Law in all its functions must be operative. And it will be so. There is not one Law that serves as a guide and another that serves as a mirror. According to content, it is the same. When it is addressed to unbelievers, it can only serve as a mirror and curb, when addressed to the Christian still imperfect because of his flesh, since the new man now is present, it will also be a guide to instruct him in his weakness as to the perfect will of God according to which he is now to live.

This simultaneous use of the Law in its various functions becomes evident also from Luther's treatment of the commandments. That he is first of all expounding the commandments as a guide to Christian faith becomes evident from his explanation to the commandments which begin: We should fear and love God. Here is instruction to you, a Christian, who fears and loves God. But at the same time we hear him explaining in the conclusion: "God threatens to punish all that transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear His wrath, and not do contrary to them." Here he speaks of the threats of the commandments, God's wrath against sin as the commandments reveal it. Here we see the commandments as revealing transgression, as well as the coercive function of the Law.

So Luther also in the *Large Catechism* speaks of the commandments as a guide to God-pleasing living when he writes:

"Thus we have the *Ten Commandments*, a compend of divine doctrine, as to what we are to do in order that our whole life may be pleasing to God, and the true fountain and channel from and in which everything must arise and flow that is to be a good work, so that outside of the Ten Commandments no work or thing can be good or pleasing to God, however great or precious it be in the eyes of the world" (*C.M.* I, 311).

At the same time he points out the ever necessary function of the Law as mirror when he at the end of the 9th and 10th commandments writes: "So that this commandment will remain, like all the rest, one that will constantly accuse us and show how godly we are in the sight of God!" (*C.M.* I, 310).

Let us summarize then what the relationship of the Law is to the Christian person.

In so far as the Christian is a new man, reborn, he is completely free from the Law. The Law has nothing to say to him. Its coercion and threats cannot reach him. Its instruction is not needed, for the new man has the mind of Christ.

But since the Christian still has flesh, an old Adam, and so is not as yet perfectly renewed, does not know the will of God perfectly, he needs to be instructed from the Law what kind of works will be pleasing to God as a fruit of his faith, his flesh will need the Law as a curb to keep it in check, above all, he will ever need to have the Law continue to reveal to him that all his righteousnesses are still filthy rags because of his flesh, that he needs in daily contrition and repentance to cast himself completely upon the mercy and grace of His God in Christ Jesus.