

The Cloud

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News and Articles from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS

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The Law Issue

By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith St. Cloud; SCSU Campus Pastor; Editor of the Cloud)

One of the first Latin phrases you learn when taking a Lutheran theology class is *lex semper accusat*. One of my friends in college had the phrase as the background on his computer. (The joke was that Joe was more Lutheran than Luther. His middle name is really Luther.) It means “the law always accuses” and is found in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, Paragraph 128. The point is that no matter how hard we try, the human heart is sinful. Everything we touch is stained by sin, and the Law is right there to show us that we don't live up to what God demands in the Law. The Gospel, which is Christ fulfilling the Law by living, dying, rising, and ascending, alone saves us.

All of that is good to remember. You can't be Lutheran if you think that you can be saved by fulfilling the Law. Here's the rub – it doesn't mean that the Law is bad. The Law shows us that we're bad, and that's because the Law is good and holy.

Many have taken the effects of the Law, that it shows us that we're bad, and turn it to say that the Law is bad. Instead of *lex semper accusat* being translated as the Law *always* accuses, many understand it to mean that the Law *only* accuses. (For more on this helpful distinction, see *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout* ed. by Ken Schurb.)

You learned in catechism that the Law has 3 uses or functions, which are often abbreviated as curb, mirror, and guide. Lutherans emphasize the 2nd use – the Law is a mirror which shows us our sin and our need for a Savior. After we confess our sins and receive forgiveness, the question then becomes, "Now what? How shall I live?" That's a great question! We're too hesitant to look to the Law after applying the Gospel. In fact, I was taught in a Homiletics class to never return to the Law after preaching the Gospel. That's unhelpful. If a man confesses that he's viewed pornography, I'm going to absolve him, and then we're going to talk about how to avoid falling back into that sin. That's the 3rd use of the Law, and it's incredibly helpful. He's under no illusion that he's forgiven because he tries harder, but Christ has set us free so that we can live godly lives.

"How shall we live?" is a question we need to ask every day. John has something to say on the matter. **"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 Jn 2:1-3).**

How shall we live? Look at the Law. The Law is God's holy will. It tells you how to live, and yes, it will always, in this life, show you your shortcomings and blemishes. Thanks to be to God that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ.

We've got another spicy issue. Take your heartburn medication if you need it. Pastor Steege gives us the Law and the Gospel according to Psalm 19. Pastor Hollingsead, in honor of the 4th Commandment and honoring our authorities, gives us the much-anticipated review of our circuit's visit to the Capitol. Pastor Buchs' article on the 6th Commandment and divorce will give everyone something to talk about and chew on. And yes, even Pastor Timm contributed; he wrote a very helpful look at the 8th Commandment in our circles. He's not retired (yet). God bless you as you live out your Christian life.

Psalm 19 Devotion

By Rev David Steege (Immanuel, Albany)

Let nothing entice you away from the comfort of His preached Word. Ps 19 is appropriate for us today to look at a culture that does not respect authority, they don't respect their creator or their redeemer. Their guilt remains on them as they chase the glory of this world. Ps 19 is a warning, but is also an invitation to repentance. Only through the One who came down from heaven to run His course to the cross can sin be forgiven. Let Him chase you in the beauty of His creation that you might become His redeemed. In the Psalms, we find Christ, the one prophesied to be our Savior in real history.

The Lord desires to separate out His faithful from the wicked. Let His crucifixion give you confidence that He desires to deliver you. Your God reveals Himself in nature yet only with His Word does His salvific knowledge come. Ps 19 speaks of nature as an eternal gift. We see it in worship festivals in the Old and New Testaments. Festivals are based on the calendar of creation. Yet all pagan religions base their faith on the creation at the expense of the Creator. Thus Ps 19 shows that the Creator and the creation go hand and hand.

Ps 19 is central to Ps 16 and 23. This pair are probably the two most consequential Psalms. The prophesy in these three Psalms speak to a new law. This new covenant is the new law of love. The Psalm speaks to the glory of creation, but even more so to the glory of God taking on flesh. He covers all sin and guilt, even the things that you are not aware of. He delivers you through the true Son, Jesus Christ. Without the sun in the sky the earth is desolate. Without the Son of God in heaven, heaven is empty.

The end of Ps 19 speaks of God as our rock. In creation, dry land provides a safe place. After sin entered the world, we needed new dry land

to save us from the flood. Jesus is the dry land. Creation is restored by Jesus so that you are taken into His eternal care. David speaks of the Father's promise through His Son. He condemns even the lust of your heart. Yet He makes you righteous. Acknowledge Christ. Let Him consume your guilt. We are guilty of many things that we are not even aware of. You are right in saying with David, "Who can discern his errors?" Pray, "Lord cleanse me from all my hidden faults."

Just as you are enlightened by the glory of creation, even more so you bask in the light of the Son of God. His glory through the Word now speaks more than even His creation. He becomes your safe place or your rock yet even more so your redeemer. The words here speak of Him enlightening you today through His Son, the very Word of God in creation. The words here are more valuable than gold, even fine gold.

Faith finds this simple wisdom in the fear of the Lord. You trust Him to take care of every thought, word, and deed that strays. You bow to Him in repentance. Your inner being tells you when you sin. He desires for you to look to Him to change rather than accept it.

Here with the words of His mouth and the meditation of your heart you become acceptable in His sight. The Word Incarnate reshapes and molds you to give you safe harbor with Jesus as the Rock of your salvation. This all comes together with the Lord taking you from the stormy waters of creation and transplanting you once again in His Temple through the gift of baptism.

In creation, the Lord sets a tent for the sun that the very Son of God reveals in with and under His Word. Ps 19 speaks to this great mercy of Jesus lifting you up as the simple man. He enlightens you to restore you to what He created you to be. **"The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Ps 19:7).**

4th Commandment: Capitol Trip

By Rev Ben Hollingsead (St. Paul's, Eden Valley)

On Tuesday, April 16th, Pastors Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven), Hoffman (Holy Cross, St. Cloud), Reber (Faith, St. Cloud and Trinity, Clear Lake), Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud), and I journeyed together to St. Paul to meet with state senators and representatives of both political parties at the State Capital.

The meetings aimed primarily to encourage and pray for each legislator. As someone skeptical of politicians and having very little optimism regarding the direction the State of Minnesota is heading, this experience brought to light the humanity of our political leaders who serve in the state capitol. With each elected official we met with, you could hear their concerns and the weight they carry due to the stress of their office and the issues being debated now in the capitol. When you read or listen to your favorite news outlet, they often portray politicians as egotistical and not genuinely caring about the problems or their constituents. I didn't find that to be the case with the legislatures we met with.

Politicians on both sides of the political aisle were polite and friendly. Representatives Bernie Perryman (St. Cloud) and Isaac Shultz (Elmdale) and Senators Nathan Wessenburg (Little Falls) and Steve Green (Bemidji) shared their concerns about significant topics like assisted suicide, education, freedom of speech, and transgenderism. These issues have legislation currently being debated, and will have serious ramifications for faithful Christian families, churches, schools, healthcare, and businesses if made law. You could see that these topics weighed heavily on their hearts, and that they were not just seeking political points. They wanted to faithfully serve Christ.

Christians often struggle to determine whether we should be involved in politics and, if so, how we can be involved. The Bible tells us that we are to be involved in politics. The first thing to do is pray. Our elected officials carry heavy burdens, and this is why Saint Paul tells us to pray for the leaders of our government in 1 Tim 2:1-4: **"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and**

giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and come to know the truth."

We pray because we know Christ is King and in control. The Holy Spirit can also bring any hardened heart to repentance and true faith. So, we pray not just for Christian politicians but also for those who are voting to counter the morality of the Bible.

Praying is first step, but not the only step. In the hallway on our way to our next meeting, Sen. Mark Koran (North Branch) stopped and talked with us. He encouraged Christians to get more involved when he said, "If the Church doesn't do politics, politics will do the Church." Christians must bring our voices of displeasure about what is happening in St. Paul to our representatives, senators, and the governor's attention. We need to encourage all Christians, not just Lutherans, to contact our elected officials. We can put positive pressure on elected officials with phone calls, e-mails, and letters to persuade them to make godly choices and remind them that they will be held accountable, if not by us, then by God. If you see one of your elected officials around town, consider having a polite conversation to encourage them, share that you are praying for them, and respectfully share a legislation concern with them.

Finally, we need to support great groups like The Minnesota Family Council and Church Ambassador Network, which are working to unite Christians of many different denominations who agree that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God and are willing to stand together against government policies that contradict the moral teachings of the Bible. Because of their hard work, we could visit the State Capitol, have meetings with legislators, have the conversations we had, and pray with and for our elected leaders. If you are financially able to help, please consider donating to the efforts of the Minnesota Family Council (mfc.org).

6th Commandment: Divorce

By Rev David Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven; CV)

Our sense of disgust is a useful, natural faculty. It keeps us from putting rotten food in our mouths and helps us to avoid critters that might hurt us. It also keeps us from even considering many sinful deeds. There are lots of abominable things that we don't even have to describe because, unless you're a psychopath, you'd never get past your sense of disgust. This is why I don't have to spend much time preaching about incest. Marry your sister? Gross.

We also have laws that help keep us from considering many sinful deeds. Murder is criminal. So is theft and lying under oath. Even when you think it might be personally advantageous, the threat of punishment helps keep your sinful inclinations at bay. As much as you may want to run that guy into the ditch for cutting you off, it's not worth the time you'll spend in court.

Beyond the law, there is also an unwritten code of acceptability. There are plenty of legal things that are simply frowned upon, and that's enough to keep us on the straight and narrow. It's not illegal, but you'd get plenty of dirty looks if you drank straight from the lemonade pitcher at the potluck. It's rude and unbecoming, so even if you'd do it at home, you won't do it at church.

Our sense of disgust and the laws of the land, written and unwritten, are helpful, but there is a hidden cost to their existence. We tend to rely on them too much in determining what is right and wrong. Is it disgusting? Of course it's wrong. Is it illegal? Of course I shouldn't do it. Is it embarrassing? Of course, I'll mind my manners. But what if it's none of those things? What if it's not disgusting or illegal or against the norm? Does that mean it's okay?

This is a big part of our present predicament. You can work it out for yourself in matters like abortion or homosexuality. In both cases, you can see how the world has moved away from righteousness,

and its sense of disgust or legality or prevailing norms has shifted. In both cases, there's enough of a sense of disgust and a grounding of norms within the church to make it easier for us to call those things sin even when the world does not.

I am afraid, however, that our sensibilities when it comes to divorce and remarriage have gone the way of the world. And so, in the church, we are left without any of these aids in determining right and wrong. No sense of disgust. No prevailing norms. Certainly no laws. Moreover, when you have leaned on a crutch for too long, you can no longer walk without it. We may hear what the Bible says, but it does not register because we have relied too heavily on everything except God's Word for teaching us about sin and righteousness.

God's Word teaches us that divorce for any reason other than sexual uncleanness or abandonment is sinful (Matt 5:32; 1 Cor 7:11-15). And for one who has committed such a sin, marrying another is adultery (Matt 19:9; Mk 10:11-12).

Nonetheless, notice how this most often goes: he and she are married, and they weren't planning to get divorced. But time wore on and their difficulty in communicating increased. And their sins against one another piled up, and they couldn't figure out how to begin cleaning up the mess. And so affection diminished and they felt like coworkers or roommates or strangers. Bitterness and contempt and survival tactics govern their lives. And they both agree – we'd be better off apart. The kids would be happier if we weren't fighting all the time. We'd probably get along better if we weren't trying to live together. There can be a peace treaty, and we can move on to the next phase of our lives. Let's just tear up this contract and try something new.

It might be sad for their friends and family and brothers and sisters in the church. It might be painful and tragic. But, is there any sense of disgust? Is there any sense that this is completely unacceptable behavior? It's certainly not illegal. And so the divorce happens, and I guess this is just the way things go.

But things usually go further. He and she are now contentedly living apart. The kids split time between their homes, and then the kids find themselves meeting mom's new boyfriend or dad's new girlfriend. And mom and dad say to themselves – "Boy, I've learned from my mistakes. This time it will be different. This time I'm going to make sure that I don't marry such a jerk." And so the devil manages to spice up the whole debacle with some fornication.

And before too long, weddings are on the horizon. A fresh start. Another attempt at marriage. Except, this time, the marriage is adultery. Jesus said so in no uncertain terms. As good as marriage is, and as many blessings as God gives through marriage, it is not good and it is not a blessing when it is adulterous.

But who would ever think that? In fact, who could ever be anything but happy for these dear friends who have been through so much? Who could ever hold it against them that they found someone to share love with and a life together? Who would be disgusted by that? Who would call that unacceptable behavior? It's certainly not illegal. And so the weddings happen, and it seems that's just the way things go. Lord, have mercy.

Look at our world to see what happens when the laws and the norms and the natural sense of disgust all change. You end up with drag queens reading deviant stories to children in public libraries. No, worse, you end up with that in church.¹

And that is why our sensibility about right and wrong must depend entirely on God's Word. We cannot rely on our personal sense of what might be good or what our own threshold for disgusting may be. Much rather, we should let the Bible teach us what to be disgusted by, what we should consider unacceptable, and what just laws would prohibit.

So here is the thought experiment for you. How would your perspective on the seriousness of divorce change if you thought of it as murder? What if, instead of a no-fault dissolution of a contract, you thought of it as two mutually consenting adults committing murder? Murdering their one flesh? Murdering their children? Would you still offer your consolation and your support? Would you still say, "Yep, it's a tragedy, but I guess it just worked out that way"?

Or how would your perspective on remarriage after divorce change if you thought of it as a forbidden union? What if, instead of a lonely soul finding love and companionship, you thought of it as a forbidden union – a father marrying his daughter, or an uncle his niece? Would you still attend the wedding? Would you still congratulate the happy couple and wish them well?

Jesus loves marriage, and he wants to protect it, which is why he gave us the 6th commandment. He loves marriage because he loves promises. He especially loves the outrageous, unconditional, timeless kind of promises. Promises like "till death do us part", which is a faint reflection of his own promise to love us all the way to the grave.

He loves marriage, which is why he is disgusted when people manhandle it. **"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:5-6).**

Let that be enough for us! Let it be enough for us that our Savior, who joined us to himself in his death and resurrection, thinks this way about divorce and remarriage. Let it be enough for us that Jesus, who has forgiven all of our sins, teaches us how to avoid sinning against marriage. Let it be enough for us that God has promised blessings through faith for those who keep his Word.

¹ www.presbyterianmission.org/story/calvary-presbyterian-church-in-san-francisco-hosts-drag-queen-bible-story-hour/

8th Commandment: Its Use and Misuse

By Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud; MNN VP)

We're not very good at keeping the 8th commandment. Every one of us is a liar. When I tell a story I'm the hero and the other person is the villain. I like to hear and talk about other pastors' problems and congregations' shortcomings because I feel better about myself.

In the corporate church (LCMS, Inc) there has been a lot of debate over keeping the 8th commandment. Social media has increased our knowledge of what other pastors and congregations are doing. In a group chat or private Facebook group you can now easily trash and bash that pastor in Chicago for what he did. What we would only hear occasionally from a vacationing member, "I went to church in Arizona, and everyone was welcome to communion" we can now see with our own eyes. What is the Christian to do when he sees Pastor Reber on Facebook offering virtual communion with Kombucha² and Triscuits? (BTW – that didn't happen and it's not true. I'm just using Pastor Reber as a bad example because I want to.)

In the LCMS, the 8th Commandment often gets boiled down to the process. Can I speak publicly about a sin that is visible publicly because it is on social media? Does Matthew 18 require a face-to-face meeting? If so, does a phone call or email constitute a face-to-face meeting? Or do I need to travel to New Jersey to speak face-to-face with the pastor who is allowing a woman to preach?

Whenever two or three sinners gather you need by-laws to keep order, but Scripture should always trump the by-laws. Christ most certainly does. Once we devolve into the process, we will mimic the world. A murderer gets off because the gun with his fingerprints on it was not found according to the proper procedure. A sinner will not be called to repent because the person calling for repentance went about it in the wrong way.

What are we to do with the 8th commandment? We are to do what Jesus did with us. He spoke the truth that we might repent and be saved. He did not speak the truth for His own advantage. The truth cost Him dearly as He offended the very people He hoped to save. Sometimes He spoke the truth publicly as He did in the Sermon on the Mount and the discourses in John's Gospel. Other times He spoke privately. Think of Nicodemus or the woman at the well. What Jesus never did was use His words to His own advantage at the expense of another.

Don't tell my mother I said this, but your mother (and mine) was wrong when she taught us, "If you can't say anything nice don't say anything at all." Jesus wasn't Minnesota Nice. He spoke words that hurt people. He told a rich guy to sell all that he had. He told a group of mourners at a funeral to stop crying. He told an adulterous woman to stop sinning. Jesus was not always nice, but He was good. He spoke the truth so that His hearers would repent of their sins and false beliefs and believe in Him as the Son of God for their salvation. That is how we should keep the 8th commandment.

Examine yourself with these questions when you are speaking to another person or about another person.

- Are you speaking for their benefit or your own?
- Are you speaking in the hopes of their salvation or to justify yourself?
- Are you hoping to hurt them, so you feel better or are you speaking the truth, even risking your relationship, to help them repent and believe in Jesus?
- Are you seeking their righteousness before God or just seeking to be right?

After examining yourself, repent. Seek forgiveness from your Pastor as from Christ Himself or from your brother or sister in Christ through mutual conversation. Then do better. Speak to others as Christ has spoken to you.

² He misspelled Kombucha, but I'm leaving it because it's funnier this way. -ed

Book Review by Rev Joshua Reber

To Be a Jew Today: A New Guide to God, Israel, and the Jewish People by Noah Feldman

If you're curious about what it means to be a Jew in 2024, this is the book for you. Feldman is Jewish himself - he's the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law and chair of the Society of Fellows at Harvard University. He's brilliant and articulate.

Being Jewish is not monolithic, which is why it takes Feldman about 400 pages to describe Jewish conceptions of God, Israel, and the Jewish People (the book is split into 3 sections, each addressing the subjects in the subtitle). Perhaps you knew that Jewish people are diverse - the terms Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative are well-known categories. Feldman finds those terms unhelpful, and opts for Traditionalist, Evolutionist, and Progressive to broadly define the groups Jews find themselves in today. These categories are self-explanatory, but it takes the entire book to explain their relationship to one another.

This book will be especially clarifying for Christians. If you have limited time, I'd suggest reading the introduction and the first part. How do Jews view God? "Judaism is well set up to allow God to be kept in the margins" (p 11). Faith in the God of the Old Testament is not fundamental to being a Jew today. Some Jews believe in a literal God, but others believe in a metaphorical one. Feldman offers theological gems to us throughout the book which Christians do well to contemplate. "If God's zeal or anger are metaphors, then so is God's love" (p 352).

The second part of the book (on modern-day Israel) is particularly illuminating - many Jews view the Messiah not as a man, but as the country of Israel ruling on earth. "To secular Zionists, the Messiah was not a man... The Messiah was a metaphor for the nation acting collectively to restore itself to full national status and sovereignty... The rest of the belief structure could *and must* (emphasis mine) be

negated, denied, and erased" (p 132). One wishes that evangelical Christians would realize this. Whether or not a Christian supports Israel ought to be a political question, not a theological one.

The third part of the book answers the question, "What is a Jew?" The answer is not ethnicity for Feldman, as opposed to Rabbinic tradition which defines a Jew as one with a Jewish mother. For Feldman, to be a Jew is to struggle together with God, whoever that God might be. He takes this from the name Israel, which means to struggle with God, whoever that guy (he points out that God is genderless because He has no body, as opposed to the Christian view that God took on a male body) is.

The New Testament defines a Jew in a couple of different ways. There are false Jews, which are those who oppose Jesus Christ (and forced Christians out of the synagogues) (Rev 2:9, 3:9). True Jews are Jews inwardly. **"But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God" (Rom 2:29)**. True descendants of Abraham are those who have the faith in Christ that Abraham had (Gal 3:7-9).

To end, I'd like to offer a thought experiment that Feldman offers. "A good test of orthodoxy in any religious context, including one that claims to deny that it has any orthodoxy, is to ask what words would get a member of the clergy fired from her job" (p 160). Feldman uses this experiment to show that belief in God is not orthodox for Jews - many Rabbis deny that God exists, and they don't get defrocked. Feldman points out that if a Rabbi denied the Holocaust or that the state of Israel had the right to exist, then they would get defrocked. Orthodoxy for Jews is centered around the Holocaust and the state of Israel. What's orthodoxy for us?

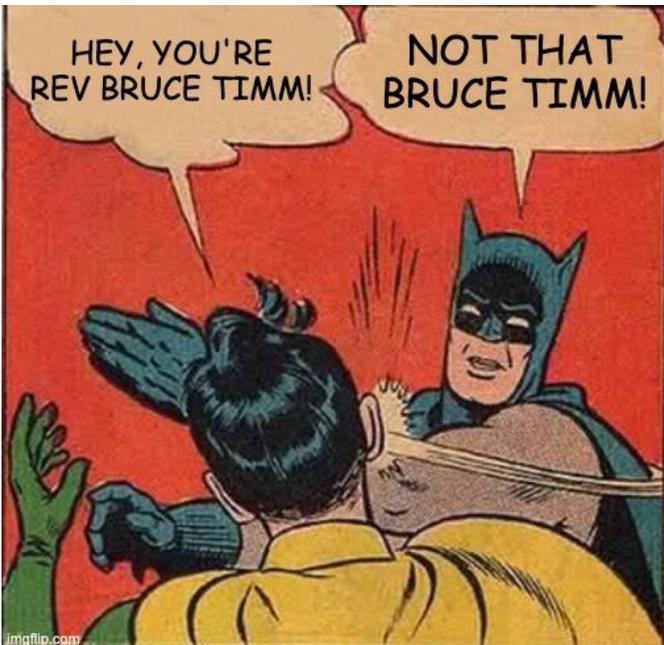
News and Memes of Grace

*St. Cloud Circuit
Ascension Day
Divine Service*

*Offerings recieved for this
service will go to support the
mission of
Luther Classical College,
Casper, WY*

*St. Paul's Evangelical
Lutheran Church
Eden Valley, MN*

*May 9th, 2024
7:00 PM*



If you don't get it, Google "Bruce Timm." Trust us, we also wish that Batman was a pastor in the circuit.

