

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! Yesterday I was at another PALS meeting. (PALS is short for Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support.) As you all know—or I hope you all know—from your own experience, it is good to be among other believers to share in the Word together for a time of uplifting and refreshing, as well as finding out things you didn't know or seeing things from a different perspective. Our meeting was no exception. Our facilitator (group leader) gave us his concept for teaching sanctification, or the Third Use of the Law. He said think of the Christian life as a train. A train runs on a track, but is not powered by it. That is how it is with the Third Use of the Law. In our lives, we are empowered by the Gospel and run along the track of the Law to guide us to our destination. With that in mind, we'll begin a new study for our newsletters: Luther's Table of Duties from the Small Catechism. (It's on p.35 of the maroon one.)



This month we will focus on the first two sections: To Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers as well as What the Hearers Owe Their Pastors. Pastors, like myself, are called by God to be ordained into the ministry and called to a particular congregation in a specific location. By my

identity as a Christian pastor, I am therefore called to act in certain ways and to avoid other ones. As Luther cites from the Scriptures: “The overseer (*here meaning pastor*) must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. **1 Tim. 3:2-4** He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. **1 Tim. 3:6** He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. **Titus 1:9**”

These are many, hard, and, in some respects, impossible qualities for any man to fulfill. Yet, as the Scriptures also tell us, what is impossible with man is possible with God. So it is for me. I had my Seminary instruction, and I continue to learn as I attend Winkels, PALS meetings, and weekly Greek studies with my brother pastors. Where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name, there is the Holy Spirit with us, instructing us, and me, on the track of sanctified pastoral work. I am by no means perfect at this; and even though I am still learning, I do err and sin. But then the Holy Spirit guides me where He guides all of us: back to the Word and Sacrament. He guides me to confession, to admitting that I’ve done wrong—me, not anyone else but me—and then I receive that blessed word of forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit continues to work in me to turn me from all sin and to live as Scripture has laid down for me above, that I might serve you.

What, then, do you owe your pastor? “The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. **1 Cor. 9:14** Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor... **Gal. 6:6...** The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose

work is preaching and teaching (*here meaning pastors*)... ‘The worker deserves his wages.’ **1 Tim. 5:17-18** We ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. **1 Thess. 5:12-13** Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. **Heb. 13:17**”

Like before, the words above may seem like an impossible, daunting task. Yet what is impossible with man is possible with God. The Holy Spirit is at work in you as you hear the Word, both Law and Gospel, every Sunday morning from your pastor. You are just as incapable at living perfectly as he and come to confess your sins just as he does. Then he, by God’s authority, pronounces God’s Word of forgiveness to you. As you hear those words, and the words of the readings each week, you’re guided on the track of your own sanctification as hearers—hearers who have many other responsibilities, but which most certainly include continuing to come and hear. We’ll get into more of those other duties as we continue this series next month.

In the meantime, may God the Holy Spirit who keeps you in the one, true faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior also keep you on track with your sanctification. And He will do this from now until Jesus comes again to take you home. We know this because of the work of our Lord Christ Jesus, who died for you, that you might be His, now and into eternity. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh