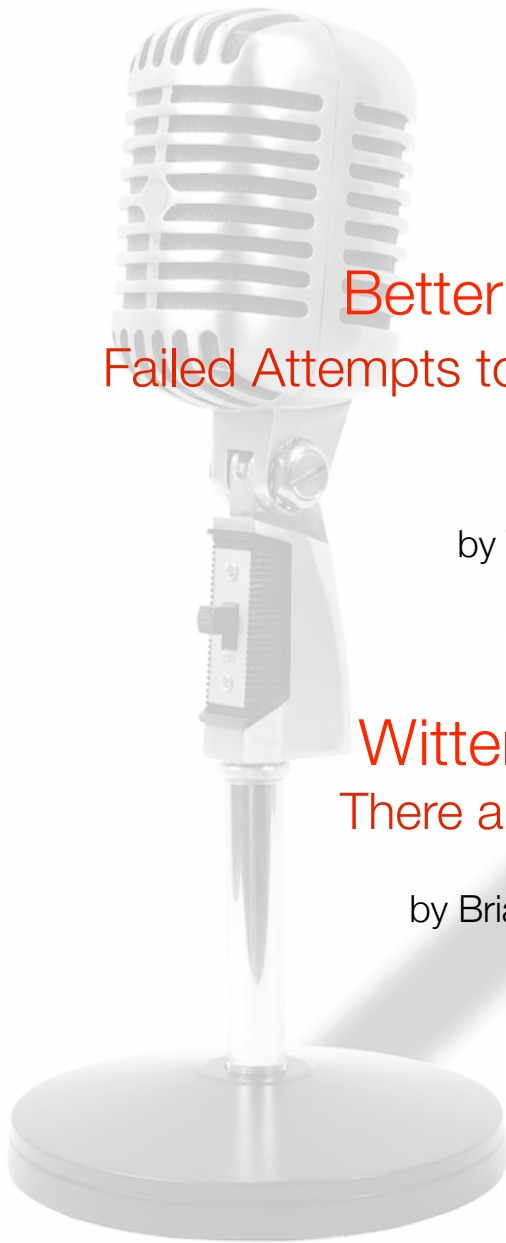


# Issues, Etc.

JOURNAL



## Better Than Good Failed Attempts to Improve on the Gospel Part 1


by Todd Wilken

## Wittenberg Trail: There and Back Again

by Brian Kachelmeier

Fall — 2016

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Dear **Issues, Etc. Journal** Reader,

Greetings in the name of Jesus.

For this edition of the *Journal*, I am following up on my previous essay, “[Is the Law Bad? Some Myths about God’s Law](#).” In this new essay, I invite the readers to think about some common myths Lutherans sometimes entertain about the Gospel. These myths, in the name of the Gospel, actually undermine it.

In the Wittenberg Trail feature, Pastor Brian Kachelmeier recounts a spiritual journey that wandered all over the theological map, and eventually led to the Lutheran confession.

You’ll also find a list of our generous sponsoring congregations at the end of the *Journal*.

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Wir sind alle Bettler,

Todd Wilken, host  
**Issues, Etc.**



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN?

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## Better Than Good

### Failed Attempts to Improve on the Gospel

#### Part 1

by Todd Wilken

*God loved the world in this way: He gave His only begotten Son. —John 3:16*

*As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. —Gal. 1:9*

In the last edition of the Journal, I wrote about some myths regarding God's Law all too common among my fellow Lutherans:

- The Law is just any bad situation.
- The Law is the opposite of the Gospel.
- The Law is the same thing as fallen man's "opinion of the law."
- The devil loves the Law.
- The Law is a theology of glory.
- The Law's aim is to kill.<sup>1</sup>

We saw that all of these myths lead to the conclusion that God's Law is a bad thing. We saw that these myths perpetuate a false understanding of the Law, resulting in a false understanding of the Gospel.



Now, I want you to think about some common myths Lutherans sometimes entertain about the Gospel. These myths can, and have, led Lutherans (who, of all people, should know better) into a kind of theology that, in the name of the Gospel, actually undermines the Gospel.

Again, just as we've become sloppy in the way we think and talk about the Law, we've become sloppy in the way we think and talk about the Gospel. And again, this is something of a personal confession, because for the better part of the last 25 years, I have been sloppy too. How? At one time or another, intentionally or unintentionally, I accepted and perpetuated some or all of the following myths about the Gospel.

Some will say that these aren't myths at all. They say that you can't overestimate the goodness of the Gospel. While that is true, none of these myths overestimate the goodness of the Gospel; they underestimate it. In one way or another, all these myths attempt to improve upon the Gospel. They attempt to present a good news that is better than the Good News of Jesus Christ. Of course, they fail.

### **Myth: The Gospel is "God loves you anyway."**

The most successful purveyor of this first myth is mega-church pastor and televangelist Joel Osteen. A recent post at his blog treated the account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1–42:

*I can imagine how amazed this woman was that Jesus knew all about her. He knew her mistakes, sins and shortcomings, and He loved her anyway. Because she received His love, the people around her were transformed as well. We have to remember that in the humanness of our existence, God knows everything about us. Even on your worst day in the most shameful situation, God knows, and He still loves you.<sup>2</sup>*

Now, at first this might sound like some real Gospel. After all, isn't the fact that God knows your mistakes, sins and shortcomings, and still loves you anyway the Gospel? Not really. "God loves you anyway" is one of those things that *sounds like* the Gospel, but it isn't. This is why Joel Osteen can preach sermon after sermon, proclaiming "God loves you anyway" and seldom mention Jesus' death on the cross for sinners.

"God loves you anyway" sounds like the Gospel but fails. Another example may help us see why. It comes from bestselling evangelical author Jen Hatmaker:

*There is nothing 'wrong with you,' or in any case, nothing more right or wrong than any of us, which is to say we are all hopelessly screwed up but Jesus still loves us beyond all reason and lives to make us all new, restored, whole. Yay for Jesus! Thank God he loves us."*<sup>3</sup>

Again, this sounds like the Gospel. It does, that is, until we notice the fact that the subjects of Hatmaker's statement are unrepentant, practicing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Hatmaker is right in saying that there is nothing "more wrong" with LGBT people than with anyone else. All of us are sinners, each of our own variety. She is also correct that all sinners are hopelessly screwed up. As we confess, none of us can free ourselves from our sinful condition. But Hatmaker is wrong on three very important points.

First, while Jesus certainly loves all sinners, He doesn't love sinners arbitrarily, or as Hatmaker says, "beyond all reason." In fact, Jesus loves sinners for a very particular and very good reason. But the reason Jesus loves sinners isn't found in sinners. Jesus loves sinners not for the sinners' sake but only for His own sake. In other words, it is in Jesus' nature to love sinners—not because they are sinners but only because He is merciful. Jesus doesn't love us "beyond all reason;" He loves us

precisely and only because it is in His nature to do so. We may not be able to understand this, but that doesn't mean Jesus' love is "beyond all reason."

Second, Jesus' love for sinners results in His work to save sinners. Yes, Jesus welcomed sinners, the worst of the worst. As we are often reminded, "He welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). But in those accounts of Jesus welcoming and eating with sinners, His love for sinners didn't end with a mere welcome to the table. The same love for sinners by which He welcomed sinners is the same love by which He died for them. In fact, Jesus could welcome sinners and eat with them *only because* He would later give His life for them on the cross. This isn't "God loves you anyway" at all. This is God loves you because of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross.

Third, while Jesus certainly loves all sinners, including those of the LGBT variety, Jesus loves sinners by first calling them to repent of their sin. Jesus didn't merely welcome sinners; He called them to repent and be forgiven. That is to say,

Hatmaker has no business welcoming any unrepentant sinners, including those of the LGBT variety, in the name of Jesus' love. Rather, she ought to do what Jesus Himself did: Call all sinners, including those of the LGBT variety, to repent and be forgiven.

As you can see, "God loves you anyway" sounds like good news but isn't. It is an attempt to improve upon the biblical Gospel. At best it teaches that God's love

## bet·ter

/'bedər/

*noun*

1. **the better one; that which is better.**  
"the Natural History Museum book is by far the better of the two"

*verb*

1. **improve on or surpass (an existing or previous level or achievement).**  
"bettering his previous time by ten minutes"  
*synonyms:* surpass, improve on, beat, exceed, top, cap, trump, eclipse

for sinners is arbitrary and disconnected from Jesus' saving work. At worst it teaches that God overlooks sin or affirms sinners in their sin.

Now you might say, "But Osteen and Hatmaker aren't Lutherans. You said these were myths Lutherans sometimes entertain about the Gospel." A final example comes from the 20th-century Luther interpreter Gerhard Forde. Forde rejected the idea that Jesus' death on the cross was a necessary condition for God to forgive sinners. According to Forde, Jesus' death did not atone for sin; rather it merely demonstrated how far God was willing to go to forgive sinners despite their rejection of that forgiveness. In other words, for Forde, Jesus didn't have to die in order for God to forgive sin. God already forgave sin spontaneously, apart from the death of His Son. Or as Forde writes:

*Why could not God just up and forgive? Let us start there. If we look at the narrative about Jesus, the actual events themselves, the "brute facts" as they have come down to us, the answer is quite simple. He did!*<sup>4</sup>

For Forde, a forgiveness earned by Jesus' death on the cross could not be mercy at all: "If God has been paid, how can one say that he really forgives? If a debt is paid, one can hardly say it is forgiven. Nor could one call God's action mercy."<sup>5</sup> For Forde, there are no conditions for God's love, not even the condition of Jesus' death on the cross. Or, in simpler terms, Forde's gospel is, "God loves you anyway."<sup>6</sup>

"God loves you anyway" is a gospel divorced from the heart of the biblical Gospel, the atoning death of Jesus for sinners.

So, if God doesn't just love us anyway, why does He love us sinners? The answer in Scripture is perfectly clear:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption to Himself*

*as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.*<sup>7</sup>

Note the repeated phrases, “In Christ...in Him...through Jesus Christ...in the Beloved...In Him...through His blood.” Whatever other reason there may be in the unsearchable will and mind of God, Scripture provides only this one, very good reason that God loves sinner like us: Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us sinners on the cross. Apart from that reason Osteen, Hatmaker and Forde have no business talking about God’s love for sinners. “God loves you anyway” isn’t the Gospel. It is a failed attempt to improve upon the Gospel.

**Myth: The Gospel is any good news.**

As noted in the previous essay addressing myths about God’s Law, this myth was a favorite of the old Lutheran liberals of the last century. They said that the Gospel is any good news in a bad situation. If you were thirsty, the Gospel was a drink of water. If you were hungry, the Gospel was a square meal. If you were unemployed, the Gospel was a regular job. Again, this allowed the old liberals to dispense with the biblical Gospel rooted in the facts of Jesus death and resurrection (which many of them denied) and replace it with their social gospel. “Preach the Gospel” no longer meant preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus; it meant any good news applied to a bad situation.

Just as the Gospel isn’t “God loves you anyway,” so also the Gospel isn’t just any good news. There are all kinds of good news, but there is only one Gospel. If you have been suffering with cancer, a clean bill of health is certainly good news—very good news. But as good as that news is, it isn’t the Gospel.

Preachers today proclaim all kinds of good news that aren't the Gospel: the good news of financial security, a better marriage, a happier family life, contentment at work, a positive attitude in life. Or perhaps it is the good news of more people joining the church, some successful missionary work or church program. All these things are good news, but none of them are the good news of the Gospel.

Even the bare message that God forgives your sins isn't yet the Good News of the Gospel. As we have seen, it could be nothing more than a variation on the "God loves you anyway" gospel; in this case, "God forgives you anyway."

There are all kinds of good news that don't require Jesus' death on the cross. They are still good news, but they aren't the Gospel. Again, the Gospel is only the specific, particular news of Jesus' death on the cross.

Even the message that Jesus died on the cross isn't yet the good news of the Gospel. Many, many people died on Roman crosses. In fact, a man dying on a cross isn't really good news at all, is it? Rather, the Gospel is the specific news that Jesus died on the cross for you, in your place, as your substitute, giving His life as the payment for your sins.

This myth is an attempt to broaden the definition of the Gospel that loses sight of Jesus and His saving work.

I've said many times, "If Jesus didn't die for you in the Sunday sermon, you didn't hear the Gospel." Listen carefully to the sermons that you hear on Sunday morning. Is the preacher preaching some good news or **the** Good News? Are you hearing the specific message of Jesus' atoning death for you a sinner? Are you hearing that Jesus' perfect life and death earns God's forgiveness and favor for you? If you're not hearing this, you may be hearing all kinds of other good news, but you're not hearing the Gospel.

## **Myth: The Gospel gives us freedom to do what we want.**

If I hadn't known better I would have thought the following conversation was satire:

*"We're Lutheran," said Anderson.*

*"Being Lutheran rocks," said Hansen, "because you get to drink and smoke and still stay out of Hell."*

*"You can have sex before marriage," said Anderson, "still go drink wine, pillage, plunder. It's great. Being Lutheran is awesome. It's part of our Norwegian heritage. All is forgiven."*

*Asked if there's anything Lutherans can't do, Anderson said, "That's a good question, because I've been testing that for a long time."<sup>8</sup>*

As difficult as it is to believe, this was a serious exchange between two famous Lutherans and an entertainment reporter in 2014. The Lutherans were Sig Hansen and Jake Anderson of the Discovery Channel's *Deadliest Catch*. Their words reflect the all too common myth that the Gospel gives Christians the freedom to do what they want.

This myth is perhaps the oldest, as old as the New Testament. It began as an accusation from the enemies of the Gospel against St. Paul: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"<sup>9</sup> Paul is combatting the idea that the Gospel gives you the freedom to sin. He emphatically rejects the idea: "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!"<sup>10</sup>

So how is it that Lutherans sometimes think that the Gospel does give us freedom to do what we want? While few Lutherans would be so bold as Sig Hansen and Jake Anderson, I have regularly heard (and sadly, have myself said) something very similar. It sounded something like, "As Christians, we are forgiven all our sins. As Christians, we are absolutely free to do anything we want. The only



question is, what does a Christian want to do?” This sounds reasonable and good, but it is terribly wrong in one point. The Gospel does not free you to do what you want.

A subtle variation on this myth is presented by Gerhard Forde, writing about what happens after someone becomes a Christian:

*So we can turn to the perennial question: ‘But we have to do something, don’t we?’ That, you see, is no longer the question. Rather the question has become: ‘What are you going to do, now that you don’t have to do anything?’ ‘What’s the matter, don’t you want to?’<sup>11</sup>*

First, Forde confuses justification and sanctification. It is true that “you don’t have to do anything” when it comes to justification. But when it comes to Christian sanctification —entirely apart for the question of how one is saved— there is much to be done.

Moreover, Forde’s questions —“What are you going to do, now that you don’t have to do anything? What’s the matter, don’t you want to?”—while read and repeated by Forde’s disciples as a kind of Gospel motivation for good works, is really all Law! In truth, it’s just a word game: “You don’t have to good works, you get to do good works, and you really should want to do good works, but you don’t. What’s wrong with you?” Or in Forde’s words, “What’s the matter? Don’t you want to?”

And that isn’t the Gospel.

The Gospel doesn’t free you to do what you want. That idea leads to either Hansen’s and Anderson’s license to sin or to Forde’s manipulative question, “What’s the matter? Don’t you want to?”

The question in Scripture for the Christian is never, “Now what do you *want* to do?” The Gospel doesn’t leave us to our own vices or devices—much less our own wants and desires. The Gospel frees us from sin and frees us to live in faith

**gospel** | 'gäspəl |

**ORIGIN**

Old English *gōdspel*, from *gōd* 'good' + *spel* 'news, a story' (see **SPELL**<sup>2</sup>), translating ecclesiastical Latin *bona annuntiatio* or *bonus nuntius*, used to gloss ecclesiastical Latin *euangelium*, from Greek *euangelion* 'good news' (see **EVANGEL**)

toward God and in love toward our neighbor. Any question after that, of what to do or not to do, is not guided by what we want but by what God has commanded.

Does the Gospel alone produce good works? Of course! But while those good works are produced by the Gospel, they are never guided by the question "What do you want to do?" Those good works are guided by what God wants you to do, by what God has commanded in His Law.<sup>12</sup>

Does a Christian want to do good works? Of course! But that desire cannot be separated from the sinful desires that remain in the Christian. "You're forgiven, now do what you want" ignores the fact that a Christian is at the same time a saint and a sinner.

Every attempt to make the Gospel into something more than it is will fail. The attempt to make the Gospel into a license to sin fails. The attempt to make the Gospel into a guide for good works fails.

The Gospel doesn't free us to sin. "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God."<sup>13</sup>

The Gospel doesn't free us to do what we want. It frees us to do what God has commanded. St. Paul writes:

*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*<sup>14</sup>

For Paul, being “under grace” does not mean freedom to do as you want; quite the opposite. He says later, “You who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”<sup>15</sup> For Paul, the Gospel frees us to live according to God’s will, not our own.

These three myths—the Gospel is “God loves you anyway,” the Gospel is any good news, and the Gospel frees you to do what you want are all attempts to improve on the biblical Gospel. All of them sound like good news, but fall far short of **the** Good News. They are not only sloppy ways to think and talk about the Gospel, they distort and undermine the Gospel.

## **Next time in Part 2:**

Myth: The Gospel produces repentance.

Myth: The Gospel is the only thing that really matters.

Myth: The Gospel trumps the text.

Myth: The Gospel is the way Christians correct errors in the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> See Todd Wilken, “Is the Law Bad? Some Myths About God’s Law,” *The Issues, Etc. Journal*, Winter: 2016 (<http://issuesetc.org/podcast/winter2016.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Osteen, “He Knows...and He Loves You Anyway!” February 23, 2016 posted at <https://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/Blog.aspx?blogid=10870>

<sup>3</sup> Jen Hatmaker, Facebook post dated April 23, 2016, cited by Taylor, Florence. “Christian Author Jen Hatmaker Calls for Full Inclusion of LGBT Community in Church,” *Christian Today*. N.p., 26 Apr. 2016 (<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christian.author.jen.hatmaker.calls.for.full.inclusion.of.lgbt.community.in.church/84813.htm>).

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<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Forde, "Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ," in *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*, Mark Mattes, Steven Paulson eds., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 90-91. Jack Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Theology of Atonement and Justification: A Confessional Lutheran Response," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 76, 3-4, July/October 2012 (<http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/KilcreaseFordeJustification.pdf>) This is what Dr. Jack Kilcrease has called, "the divine act of forgiveness by fiat i.e., forgiveness without a payment for sin" (p.282) Kilcrease: "God spontaneously forgives sinners by an act of fiat." (p. 290)

<sup>5</sup> Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1972, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> To be fair, one of Forde's concerns is valid, namely that the cross is more than a judicial necessity and that we do not bind God to a rule or law higher than himself. Whatever condition God imposes on His forgiveness, He imposes Himself. Nonetheless, that is no reason to reject the atonement, the condition of Jesus' death or to teach forgiveness by divine fiat.

<sup>7</sup> Eph. 1:3

<sup>8</sup> O'Hare, Kate. "'Deadliest Catch': Sig Hansen and Jake Anderson on Being Lutherans and Husbands," N.p., 22 Apr. 2015. Web. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/kateohare/2015/04/deadliest-catch-sig-hansen-and-jake-anderson-on-being-lutherans-and-husbands/>

<sup>9</sup> Rom. 6:1.

<sup>10</sup> Rom. 6:15.

<sup>11</sup> Forde, *Justification by Faith - A Matter of Life and Death*, Mifflintown: Sigler Press, 1990, 56.

<sup>12</sup> The Lutheran Confessions simply do not speak in Forde's terms: "It is also necessary to set forth distinctly what the gospel does, creates, and works in connection with the new obedience of believers and what function the law performs in this matter, as far as the good works of believers are concerned the law indeed tells us that it is God's will and command that we should walk in the new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin it or to do it. It is the Holy Spirit, who is not given and received through the law but through the preaching of the gospel (Gal. 3:2, 14), who renews the heart. Then he employs the law to instruct the regenerate out of it and to show and indicate to them in the Ten Commandments what the acceptable will of God is (Rom. 12:2) and in what good works, which God has prepared beforehand, they should walk (Eph. 2:10)." SD VI, 10-12.

<sup>13</sup> Gal. 5:1, 13; 1 Peter 2:16. See also the Lutheran Confessions: "Accordingly, we also believe, teach, and confess that when it is said: The regenerate do good works from a free spirit, this is not to be understood as though it is at the option of the regenerate man to do or to forbear doing good when he wishes, and that he can nevertheless retain faith if he intentionally perseveres in sins" (EP. IV, 6). "But it is false, and must be censured, when it is asserted and taught as though good works were free to believers in the sense that it were optional with them to do or to omit them, or that they might or could act contrary thereto [to the Law of God], and none the less could retain faith and God's favor and grace" (SD. IV, 20). "Above all, therefore, the false Epicurean delusion is to be earnestly censured and rejected, namely, that some imagine that faith and the righteousness and salvation which they have received can be lost through no sins or wicked deeds, not even through willful and intentional ones, but that a Christian although he indulges his wicked lusts without fear and shame, resists the Holy Ghost, and purposely engages in sins against conscience, yet none the less retains faith, God's grace, righteousness, and salvation. Against this pernicious delusion the following true, immutable, divine threats and severe punishments and admonitions should be often repeated and impressed upon Christians who are justified by faith: 1 Cor. 6:9: Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, etc., shall inherit the kingdom of God. Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5: They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Rom. 8:13: If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die. Col. 3:6: For which thing's sake the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience" (SD IV 31-32).

<sup>14</sup> Rom. 6:12-14.

<sup>15</sup> Rom. 6:17-18.



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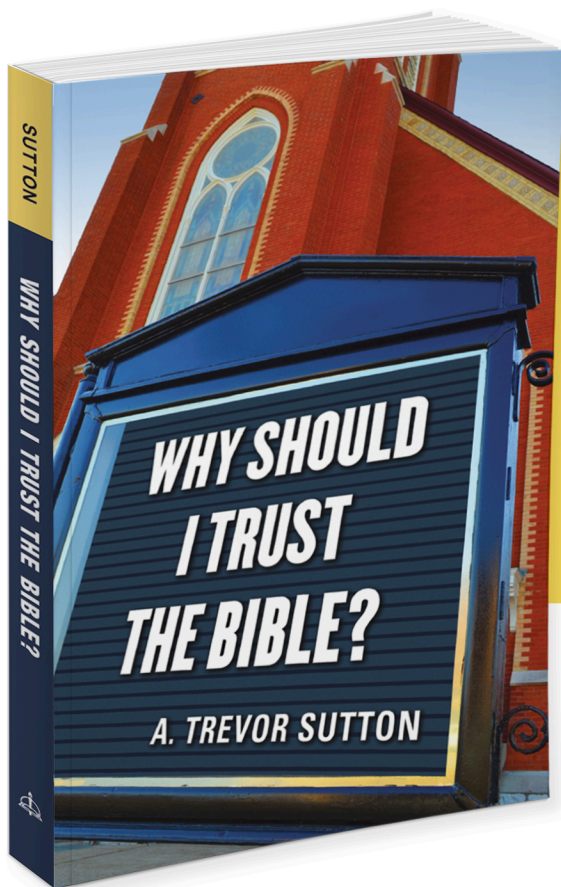


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# Wittenberg Trail: There and Back Again

by Brian Kachelmeier

I did not grow up Lutheran; instead, I became Lutheran. My journey to the Lutheran Faith began in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which was both the place of my first birth and my second birth. After being born at St. Joseph's Hospital, I was born again in the waters of Holy Baptism at Holy Family Catholic Parish. One could say that all babies are baptized Lutheran. As a child, I was nurtured by the Catholic liturgy. When I was old enough, I enrolled in CCD classes that lead toward my First Communion. I don't remember ever praying the rosary, but I participated in the liturgy on a weekly basis. However, in my teenage years, my family fell away from regular attendance at Mass. Therefore, when the time came to enroll in confirmation classes, I opted out.

During my senior year of high school, I met a Mormon girl. It was at this point in life that I began to ponder my own spiritual identity. What does it mean to be Catholic? What does it mean to be Mormon? Well, the question was left unanswered, and I continued on my individual way in the game called life.

During my sophomore year at the University of New Mexico, I met a Southern Baptist girl named Andi. Again, I contemplated my own spiritual identity. Well, things were different this time around. I attended weekly worship at her Baptist church. I became intrigued with reading the Bible. The more I learned, the more I wanted to tell others about what I had learned. As my identity was being formed as a Baptist, I fell in love with that young Baptist girl and took upon the vocation of husband. No



longer was I on an individual journey. Now I had a shared spiritual identity. We were Baptist. As my craving to learn about the sacred Scriptures intensified, my goal of becoming an architect was replaced by a new desire to become a pastor. I felt inadequate. I was biblically illiterate. I decided to change my major to Religious Studies in order to take as many courses as possible regarding the Bible and the Christian faith. Now keep in mind that this is a secular institution.

During the week, I attend classes ranging from topics such as Reformation History, C. S. Lewis, and even the Bible as literature. Every Sunday, I attended worship service and Sunday School at the Baptist church. As my spiritual identity was being developed, I was taught that the Baptist church was correct in its interpretation of the Bible because it took the Word of God literally.

Now that made sense to me until the sermon was on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The boasting of a literal interpretation quickly was replaced by a symbolical interpretation. When Jesus took the bread and gave it to His disciples, the pastor said that Jesus meant to say, "Take and eat. This symbolizes My body." I was left dumbfounded. From my liturgical formation in the Roman Catholic church, I had always assumed that "is" means "is." To resolve this sudden identity crisis, I set up an appointment to meet with my Baptist pastor. In our discussion about the topic of the Lord's Supper, he never once opened up a Bible, recited a verse, or even bothered to explain why one must take this passage symbolically. Instead, he literally mocked me for being so silly to think that Jesus could actually give us His very body to eat. He told me that if I viewed the Lord's Supper from this perspective, then he had a bridge in Florida that he would like to sell to me. Needless to say, I was not impressed.

After that event took place, I was no longer a Baptist. The discrepancy in a non-literal interpretation of the Lord's Supper led to the realization that the doctrine

of Baptism was likewise based on a symbolic reading. One was not literally buried with Christ; one merely pretended to be buried with Christ in the outward act of immersion in water. The teaching on Baptism was not based upon passages that actually talked about baptism; instead, passages were quoted referring to faith in Christ with no reference to Baptism at all. The Baptist teaching on “once saved always saved” was based upon a listing of proof-texts that teach about the assurance of salvation in Christ alone (Gospel passages) while ignoring all of the warning passages about losing the inheritance of eternal life (Law passages). The notion of saying the sinner’s prayer and asking Jesus into the heart was proved by the words to the church in Laodecia in Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me.” Again, note the lack of a literal interpretation. The more that I studied the sacred Scriptures, the more I realized that the Baptists did not faithfully hold to the faith handed down by the apostles.

I found myself in a rather peculiar situation. I was planning on graduating with an undergraduate degree in Religious Studies so that I could attend a seminary to become a pastor. Not only did I not know what seminary to attend, I didn’t even know what type of a Christian I was. It was at this point that I struggled with the difference between being Catholic or Protestant. What does it mean to be a Christian? During the week I attended classes at UNM learning the historic development of the variety of Christian denominations. For me the key to unlocking the riddle of my Christian identity was found in the history of the Church. If one wanted to know what a Protestant was, one would need to study the history of the Reformation. Every Sunday, we attended different churches (Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, ELCA, LCMS, WELS). Each time I would ask the pastor theological questions. I was impressed by a WELS pastor who let me borrow some books from his library. I was drawn toward a Lutheran identity. It was only in the

Lutheran faith, that a person was able to take a passage of Scripture in one hand and then take an apparent contradictory passage in the other hand. Only the Lutherans could maintain the apparent paradox and say, “Yes and amen.” It was the Lutherans who taught me the simplicity of the Gospel. Everything I needed, I already had in my Baptism.

My wife Andi and I decided to join an ELCA church in Albuquerque. Now keep in mind that my new identity as a Lutheran was formed by my rejection of “fundamentalism” as I saw it in the Southern Baptist church. Thus, anything that sounded conservative (e.g., a literal six-day creation, male only pastors, inerrancy, etc.) I considered wrong. For this reason, the WELS and LCMS were not tolerable options. But what does it mean to be Lutheran? As I wanted to grow in my identity as a Lutheran, I special ordered a Tappert edition of the *Book of Concord* and began reading it on my own. Well, the key for me in unlocking my Lutheran identity was found in the history of the Lutheran church.

While in that ELCA congregation, I became the youth director. It was at this intersection in my life that I befriended a college age student named Bryan Wolfmueller (yes, the Bryan Wolfmueller of Issues, Etc. fame). He was a member at the same ELCA congregation. Bryan loved to volunteer with the youth and argue theology with me. He would state his case for such things as the inerrancy of Scripture, six-day creation, and male-only pastors while I would state the case for the Lutheran understanding of the efficacy of Scripture, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. Let the reader understand that although Bryan was an ELCA Lutheran, his spiritual identity was being formed by Calvary Chapel and Southern Baptist teachings. As the Holy Spirit teaches us in Proverbs, “Iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another.” Overtime, we both became confessional Lutherans and that led us into the LCMS. Also at this time, I befriended Pastor Randy Golter who was serving as an LCMS pastor in Albuquerque. Bryan stayed in Albuquerque

under the spiritual care of Pastor Golter and my wife Andi and I moved to Houston, Texas, placing ourselves under the spiritual care of Pastor Larry White of Our Savior Lutheran Church where I served as the Director of Parish Education. While I continued to grow in my Lutheran identity under the teaching of Pastor White, I maintained “conversations” with Bryan Wolfmueeller. Together we resolved to enter into pastoral formation at Concordia Theological Seminary. We both moved our families to Fort Wayne in the summer of 2001.

As I reflect on my journey into the Lutheran faith, I am thankful for the people that the Holy Spirit has used to impact my life. Let us not underestimate the gift of theologically sound laity and faithful Lutheran pastors. Let us never fail to recognize the importance of programs like Issues, Etc., which works to promote a truly Lutheran identity that is founded upon Christ the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.



Pastor Brian Kachelmeier was born and raised in New Mexico. In 2005, he graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne and was sent back to New Mexico to plant a mission congregation in Los Alamos, Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church. A sanctuary was built and dedicated to the glory of God and salvation of men. Pr. Kachelmeier teaches for the Biblical Orthodox Lutheran Mission, an internet based outreach in Arabic, and hosts the radio show *Redeemer Theological Academy*. He is also enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Concordia Theological Seminary.



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34 Alden Dr  
Auburn, NE 68305  
402-274-4210

St. Paul's Lutheran  
Rev. Allen K. Strawn  
506 Main St  
Bridgeport, NE 69336  
308-262-0424

Immanuel Lutheran  
Rev. Scott Porath  
1009 G St  
Eagle, NE 68347  
402-781-2190

Good Shepherd Lutheran  
Rev. Lance Berndt  
Rev. Clint Poppe  
3825 Wildbriar Ln  
Lincoln, NE 68516  
402-423-7639

Redeemer Lutheran  
Rev. Mark Ebert  
510 S 33rd St  
Lincoln, NE 68501  
402-477-1710

Lamb of God Lutheran  
Rev Philip Houser  
1010 W Lincoln St  
Papillion NE 68046  
402-934-9045

## NEVADA

Grace Lutheran  
Rev. Douglas Barnett  
2657 W. Horizon Ridge Pkwy  
Henderson, NV 89052  
702-492-4701

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

[Immanuel Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Donald Colageo  
673 Weston Rd  
Manchester, NH 03103  
603-622-1514

## NORTH CAROLINA

[Our Redeemer Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Tod Rappe  
1605 Van Buren Ave.  
Fayetteville, NC 28303  
910-488-6010

[Trinity Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Thomas Olson  
3353 US 176 North  
Tryon, NC 28782  
828-859-0379

## OHIO

[Bethlehem Lutheran](#)  
Rev Arthur Casci  
1240 S Maple Ave  
Fairborn OH 45324  
937-878-0651

[Immanuel Lutheran](#)  
Rev Kevin Jud  
1285 Main St  
Hamilton OH 45013  
513-893-6792

[Immanuel Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Michael Phillips  
2120 Lakewood Ave  
Lima, OH 45805  
419-222-2541

[Gethsemane Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Brett Cornelius  
219 E Church St  
Marion, OH 43302  
740-375-0599

[St. Pauls Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Paul Schlueter  
7960 State Route 38  
Millford Center, OH 43045  
937-349-2405

[St. John Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Stephen Niemann  
16035 County Rd U  
Napoleon, OH 43505  
419-598-8961

[Bethlehem Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Robert Green  
7500 State Rd  
Parma, OH 44134  
440-845-2230

[Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran](#)  
Rev. John Rutz  
13101 Five Point Rd  
Perrysburg, OH 43551  
419-874-6939

[Hope Lutheran](#)  
Rev Benjamin Meyer  
15370 Meredith State Rd  
Sunbury OH 43074  
740-965-1685

## OKLAHOMA

[St Mark Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Mark Erler  
1501 N Bryant  
Edmond, OK 73034  
405-340-0192

[Grace Lutheran](#)  
2331 E 5th Pl  
Tulsa, OK 74104  
918-592-2999

## OREGON

[Holy Cross Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Bruce Ley  
2515 Queen Ave SE  
Albany, OR 97322  
541-928-0214

[Reformation Lutheran](#)  
Rev Steven Brockdorf  
4435 SE Tualatin Valley Hwy  
Hillsboro OR 97123  
503-648-1393

## PENNSYLVANIA

[Prince of Peace Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Michael Podeszwa  
60 Rochester Rd  
Freedom, PA 15042  
724-728-3881

[St John Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Robert Kieselowsky  
25 E Scenic Rd  
Springfield, PA 19064  
610-543-3100

[Grace Lutheran](#)  
Rev. David Young  
1169 W Street Rd  
Warminster, PA 18974  
215-672-8181

## SOUTH CAROLINA

[Faith Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Ted Crandall  
37 Marshellen Drive  
Beaufort, SC 29901  
843-812-9178

[Holy Trinity Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Christopher Burger  
2215 Devine St  
Columbia, SC 29205  
803-799-7224

[Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd](#)  
Rev. Steven Saxe  
1601 N. Pleasantburg Dr  
Greenville, SC 29609  
864-244-5825

## SOUTH DAKOTA

[Mount Calvary Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Matthew Wurm  
629 9th Ave.  
Brookings, SD 57006  
605-692-2678

[Peace Lutheran Church](#)  
Rev. David Lindenberg  
219 E Saint Anne St  
Rapid City, SD 57701  
605-721-6480

[Christ Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Matthew Nix  
4801 E 6th St  
Sioux Falls, SD 57110  
605-338-3769

## TENNESSEE

[Grace Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Larry Peters  
Rev. Daniel Ulrich  
2041 Madison St  
Clarksville, TN 37043  
931-647-6750

[Redeemer Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Philip Young  
800 Bellevue Rd  
Nashville, TN 37221-2702  
615-646-3150

[St. Paul Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Robert Portier  
1610 Pullen Rd  
Sevierville, TN 37862  
865-365-8551

## TEXAS

[Trinity Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Paul Harris  
1207 W 45th  
Austin, TX 78756  
512-453-3835

[St Paul Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Mark Nuckols  
Rev. Sherman Stenson  
3501 Red River St  
Austin, TX 78705  
512-472-8301

[Bethel Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Thomas Baden  
1701 N Broadway  
Ballinger, TX 76821  
325-942-9275

[Our Redeemer Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Brent McGuire  
7611 Park Lane  
Dallas, TX 75225  
214-368-1371

[Grace Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Carl Roth  
801 W 11th St  
Elgin, TX 78621  
512-281-3367

[Mount Calvary Lutheran](#)  
Rev. Thomas Baden  
12358 Country Rd 5500  
Eola, TX 76937  
325-942-9275

[Redeemer Lutheran](#)  
Rev. David Grassley  
4513 Williams Rd  
Fort Worth, TX 76116  
817-560-0030

[Holy Shepherd Lutheran](#)  
Rev Christopher Bramich  
1500 FM 156 S  
Haslet TX 76052  
817-439-2100

Our Savior Lutheran  
Rev. Dr. Laurence White  
Rev. David Vandercook  
5000 West Tidwell Rd  
Houston, TX 77091  
713-290-9087

Messiah Lutheran  
Rev. Glenn Huebel  
Rev. Tom Chryst  
1308 Whitley Rd  
Keller, TX 76248  
817-431-2345

Bethlehem Lutheran  
Rev. Randall Smith  
5084 Church Ln  
North Zulch, TX 77872  
936-399-5563

Faith Lutheran  
Rev. Thomas Baden  
801 1st St  
Ozona, TX 76943  
325-942-9275

Faith Lutheran  
Rev. James Woelmer  
Rev. Robert Hill  
Rev. Jacob Sutton  
1701 E Park Blvd  
Plano, TX 75074  
972-423-7447

Lord of Life Lutheran  
Rev. Joel Shaltanis  
3601 W. 15th St  
Plano, TX 75075  
972-867-5588

Trinity Lutheran  
Rev. Allan Eckert  
3536 Lutheran Way  
San Angelo, TX 76904  
325-944-8660

Mount Calvary Ev. Lutheran  
Rev. David Reedy  
Rev. Mark Pulliam  
308 Mt Calvary Dr.  
San Antonio, TX 78209  
210-824-8748

St. John Lutheran  
Rev. L. Lynn Lubke  
1000 N Crockett St.  
San Benito TX 78568  
956-399-3422

Hope Lutheran  
Rev. Thomas Baden  
417 E 2nd St  
Sonora, TX 76950  
325-942-9275

## **VIRGINIA**

Immanuel Lutheran  
Rev. Christopher Esget  
1801 Russell Rd  
Alexandria, VA 22301  
703-549-0155

St. Athanasius Lutheran  
Rev. James Douthwaite  
114 Kingsley Rd SW  
Vienna, VA 22180  
703-455-4003

## **WASHINGTON**

Peace Lutheran  
Rev. Daniel Freeman  
2071 Bishop Rd  
Chehalis, WA 98532  
360-748-4108

Faith Lutheran  
Rev. Timothy Winterstein  
171 Eastmont Ave.  
East Wenatchee, WA 98802  
509-844-7623

Immanuel Lutheran  
Rev. Kyle Heck  
2531 Lombard Ave  
Everett, WA 98201  
425-252-7038

Messiah Lutheran  
Rev. Kurt Onken  
9209 State Ave  
Marysville, WA 98270  
360-659-4112

Messiah Lutheran  
Rev. Ernie Lassman  
Rev. Trevor Mankin  
7050 35th Ave NE  
Seattle, WA 98115-5917  
206-524-0024

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran  
Rev. Kerry Reese  
Rev. Warrens Berger  
9225 212th St SE  
Snohomish, WA 98296  
360-668-7881

Parkland Lutheran  
Rev. Glenn Obenberger  
120 123rd St S  
Tacoma WA 98444  
253-537-5492

## **WISCONSIN**

St. John's Lutheran  
Rev. John Neugebauer  
E 5221 Church Rd  
Algoma, WI 54201  
920-487-2335

St. Peter's Lutheran  
Rev. Christopher Amen  
303 Park St.  
Arlington, WI 53911  
608-635-4825

Zion Lutheran  
Rev. T. Clint Stark  
110 E Grand Ave  
Chippewa Falls, WI 54729  
715-723-6380

Elm Grove Lutheran  
Rev. Larry Myers  
Rev. Eric Skovgaard  
945 N Terrace Dr  
Elm Grove, WI 53122  
262-797-2970

Mount Zion Lutheran  
Rev. Aaron Koch  
3820 W Layton Ave  
Greenfield, WI 53221  
414-282-4900

Messiah Lutheran  
Rev. James Roemke  
2026 22nd Ave.  
Kenosha, WI 53140  
262-551-8182

St. John Lutheran  
Rev. James Mallmann  
450 Bridge St  
Mayville, WI 53050  
920-387-3568

Peace Lutheran  
Rev. Ricky Schroeder  
1228 S Park Ave  
Neenah, WI 54956  
920-725-0510

Grace Lutheran  
Rev. Randal Poppe  
3700 Washington Ave  
Racine, WI 53405  
262-633-4831

St. John's Lutheran  
Rev. Jacob Gilbert  
510 Kewaunee St  
Racine, WI 53402  
262-637-7011

St. Jakobi Lutheran  
Rev. Travis Kleinschmidt  
W 8089 County Rd A  
Shawano, WI 54166  
715-524-4347

Luther Memorial Chapel  
Rev. Dr. Ken Wieting  
3833 N Maryland Ave  
Shorewood, WI 53211  
414-332-5732

Peace Lutheran  
Rev. Peter Bender  
W240 N6145 Maple Ave  
Sussex, WI 53089  
262-246-3200

## **WYOMING**

Trinity Lutheran  
Rev. Daniel Holthus  
1240 S Missouri Ave  
Casper, WY 82609  
307-234-0568

Zion Lutheran  
Rev. Paul Rosberg  
601 S 9th St  
Douglas, WY 82633-2704  
307-358-2810

Trinity Lutheran  
Rev. Scott Firminhac  
Rev. Jared Tucher  
1001 E 9th St  
Gillette, WY 82717  
307-682-4886

Redeemer Lutheran  
Rev. David Bott  
175 N. Willow St  
Jackson, WY 83001  
307-733-3409

**CANADA**

St. Matthew Lutheran  
Rev. Michael Keith  
5021 52 Ave

Stony Plain, AB T7Z1C1  
780-963-2416

Bethel Lutheran  
Rev Jamie Bosma  
264 Wilson St  
Thunder Bay ON P7B1M9  
807-344-8322



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