

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY
2021 SYMPOSIUM ON PASTORAL WELLNESS

Reaction to Mark Paustian's Essay
I Am Convinced

THE PERSPECTIVE

It is one thing to talk about a topic. It is a completely other thing to permit a moment in time to be the topic. Rather than discussing in legitimate abstract fashion what produces spiritual wellness, you directly applied the powerful tools of law and gospel to the hearts of your hearers, that we might be encouraged today and motivated for tomorrow.

Not only did you serve as a doctor of souls, but you reminded us that this is not to be the last time Christian brothers hold each other up. Fellow Christians are a blessing, ones who support and encourage and rebuke and comfort and curb and guide me, and you, and every one of us. As you have been that brother to us today, may we continue to benefit from, and be of benefit to, those parts of the body of Christ that walk with us this side of heaven.

THE PATH

You began your journey in Romans 7. We have a part in us that remains a slave to sin, but that is not the real me. That is an enemy, an intruder, and an object daily to despise and destroy. The real me is the new person who knows of God's gift through Jesus Christ our Lord and who delights in the law of God.

- What are the practical personal implications of a pastor waking up in the morning without a clear focus on his dual nature?
- How does a scriptural understanding of the dual nature of the Christian impact the way a pastor preaches the law to himself and to others?

Your path continued with “no condemnation for those who are in Christ,” true life as ones controlled by the Spirit, and our status as children of God. Repeatedly, you encouraged us to appreciate just what a big thing God has done for us. This was not a small sacrifice. The love of Christ is not a narrow or short thing.

- The path of this presentation might seem, at some level, like Law and Gospel 101. It might feel too familiar, and perhaps that is a key contributor to personal spiritual weakness. At the same time, we acknowledge that to get law and gospel right is a challenge of divine proportions. Where do we as pastors most easily get off the track when it comes to personal appropriation of the gospel?

Suffering comes next, with the incredibly categorical commitment on the part of our God to shape absolutely everything that happens in life for our eternal good. Everything. Everything. One wonders how often Satan finds this doctrine an easy entry point to introduce doubt into the heart of a spiritual leader. What would life be like if we could see in every outward discouragement and every earthly challenge and every interpersonal dilemma and every surprise turning-upside-down-of-our-schedule nothing more than a moment for awe – “this is really hard, but I can’t wait to see how God is going to use this craziness to bring a blessing that would stun me.” (We lost cooling in our refrigerator over a week ago. It was our son who, out of the blue, spoke the right words . . . God’s promise to work this out for our good, even as we have come to know well the carting of yogurt and vegetables up and down the stairs for days.) What would life be like if, in the face of every pain, we wept and hurt and planned and worked, but with that sense you have when watching a movie where you know the ending will be happy? But this is not Hollywood. This is for real!

- In what different ways can we help keep the words “God is working all things for our good” from communicating a dismissive diminishment of the authentic pain and struggle which are part of a pastor’s personal and professional life?

Paul now invites us to talk. What shall we say in connection with all of these things? There is only one thing to say – we can't lose! At the heart is our status of innocence. From that heart, confidence flows to every appendage of life. Nothing will get in the way of God's love embracing, supporting, preserving, and leading us to victory every day, and into that eternal day. The grand "nothing" is all-inclusive. It is the opposite of "all things" and yet teaches the same reality. These are our words of defiance in the face of an enemy who lies. There is nothing that can separate us. This is the last word.

- As we thank the Lord for relative earthly peace and for the freedoms of our day, we may feel we aren't facing the number and kinds of enemies that Paul faced. Things may get worse someday, but for today, the relevance of Romans 8:35–39 may seem less. What is the best way to respond to such a perspective?

THE PRACTICE

There is nothing more practical than the presentation of powerful rebuking and comforting truths. Yet a variety of personal practices flow from such truth. Spending time in thoughtful interaction with the word leads the way.

- The classic dichotomy when discussing a pastor's engagement with Scriptures is this: there is a "professional" use, and then there is a "devotional" use. While ministry certainly requires consideration of how the word applies to others, how can a pastor ensure that even such "other-focused" uses of the word retain a personal/devotional aspect?

We are parts of the body of Christ, and so it is only natural for God to use us to serve one another.

- Personalities range from ultra-social to exceptionally independent. The blessing of the body of Christ is there for all personalities. Considering the encouragement to engage with one's brothers, to what degree do personality inclinations legitimately shape the

nature of such interaction, and to what degree do personality inclinations impact such interaction inappropriately?

Your work was a blessing to us because your well-crafted words brought clearly to mind the heart of our God. Thank you, Mark. May the Lord keep firmly in mind that at the heart of being in the right place spiritually is being in the right place – in the presence of God's gracious Spirit.

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