

Calov Conference
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Rev. Rolf David Preus

Session One: The Christian's Fellowship with God
Session Two: The Christian's Fellowship with Christians
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Session One: The Christian's Fellowship with God

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16-17

Life is fellowship with God. Break the fellowship and man dies. The Holy Spirit breathes life. It was a life in which man knew God, loved God, wanted what God wanted, was perfectly content and in perfect fellowship with God. That was life. When God threatened Adam with death He was warning him about the consequences of sin, about what he would lose. Sin breaks fellowship with God. Sin yields death. The soul that sins it shall die. The wages of sin is death. When Adam sinned, the world sinned with him.

All mankind fell in Adam's fall
One common sin infects us all
From sire to son the bane descends
And over all the curse impends.

All manmade religions fail because they try to regain fellowship with the divine by means of doing what broke the fellowship in the first place. They seek sanctification in sin. God is angry with sin. God is especially angry with the offering of sin to placate Him, gain his favor, or secure his blessings.

When man broke fellowship with God he fell into sin. Sinners cannot find their way to God. Every effort to do so results in some kind of idolatry. Having lost the image of God in which he was created, natural man creates his own god in his own image and worships what he has made. He imagines that his idol is God, but it is not. St. Paul explains how this works in Romans 1. The natural knowledge of God means that those who deny God have no excuse for their idolatry. But sinners cannot help but be idolaters. I say this not to excuse their idolatry but to explain it. Having broken fellowship with God fallen man, carnal man, natural man, has a distorted understanding of God. They know his divine power and Godhead as St. Paul says, but they don't understand God's fatherly nature. Take Islam as an example of a manmade monotheistic religion based on the natural knowledge of God. Their god is not their father. That just doesn't compute.

The devil lied when he promised Adam and Eve that they would know the difference between good and evil. For once you know evil you cannot know the good except in theory. But good and evil are known experientially, not just cerebrally. Once fellowship with God is broken, all of man's religious impulses are shot. This is how we Lutherans describe this condition in the Formula of Concord:

That original sin (in human nature) is not only this entire absence of all good in spiritual, divine things, but that, instead of the lost image of God in man, it is at the same time also a deep, wicked, horrible, fathomless, inscrutable, and unspeakable corruption of the entire nature and all its powers, especially of the highest, principal powers of the soul in the understanding, heart, and will, so that now, since the Fall, man inherits an inborn wicked disposition and inward impurity of heart, evil lust and propensity; that we all by disposition and nature inherit from Adam such a heart, feeling, and thought as are, according to their highest powers and the light of reason, naturally inclined and disposed directly contrary to God and His chief commandments, yea, that they are enmity against God, especially as regards divine and spiritual things. FC SD I 11-12

The quest for God will always end in idolatry. Unless.

The "unless" is the foundation and source of the Christian doctrine of fellowship. What God does to reconcile the world to Himself is not a mere gesture or sign. It causes reconciliation. Unless God does it there can be no reconciliation. St. Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 5,

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. . . . For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19,21

Reconciliation was achieved by Christ becoming sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Paul writes again in Colossians 1,

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. Colossians 1:19-20

Reconciliation occurs as Christ suffers on the cross the punishment for our sins. Reconciliation is the result of Christ's death. That's because Christ is the propitiation for our sins. As St. John writes,

And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. 1 John 2:1a-2

And again, he writes,

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10

Christ is the propitiation for our sins. He propitiates God. But John doesn't call him the propitiator. He calls him the propitiation. He propitiates by becoming sin for us. It is the bearing of the sin of the world, becoming the sinner by the imputation of the world's sin, and as the sinner, bearing the wrath of God against all sinners, that turns away God's anger and brings about reconciliation between God and men.

Reconciliation comes from propitiation. So does justification. St. Paul writes in Romans 5:8-11,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Reconciliation and justification are used interchangeably to refer to the same thing. If God's anger against us is gone our sins are gone. If our sins are gone God's anger against us is gone. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. To bear means to suffer the burden of sin. It means taking it away by bearing it. The vicarious satisfaction or atonement is how sins are forgiven, and no sin is forgiven apart from it. On the one side you have the antinomians and Fårdeites who deny the vicarious satisfaction while pretending to teach justification through faith alone. On the other side you have the papists and other synergists who affirm the vicarious atonement but deny that this means we are justified through faith alone. There is no vicarious atonement without the forgiveness of sins. Roman Catholics teach objective justification every time they sing the Agnus Dei whether they mean to or not. And there is no forgiveness of sins without the vicarious atonement. This is why the radical Lutherans who mutter words about Anselmian theories of the atonement are cutting off the branch on which they are sitting, waiting to crash.

To reestablish the broken fellowship cannot be done by the one who broke it. Now that's rather counterintuitive. You break it, you fix it. But it can't be done. God made Adam in God's image. Seth was born in Adam's image. Adam and his children were not what God in the beginning created them to be and did not have the spiritual capacity to commune with God. God himself would have to achieve the restoration of fellowship if fellowship were ever to be restored. This required both the vicarious satisfaction from which forgiveness and reconciliation come as well as the bestowal of forgiveness and reconciliation on sinful man. This is God's gracious doing. God does this through means.

It is God's gracious doing. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." By grace. What does Paul mean by grace? Does he mean divine help to do good works? No. Grace excludes works. St. Paul writes in Romans 11:5-6,

Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

To be saved is to be restored back into fellowship with God. It is by God's grace alone. The doctrine of synergism, officially taught by the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and many Protestants, is that God and man work together to achieve man's conversion. Synergism means working together. It is a cooperative effort. The problem with synergism is that it doesn't understand sin and its effects. Sin renders man spiritually blind, dead, and at enmity with God.

He is spiritually blind. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:13-14,

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

He is spiritually dead. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:4-7,

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

He is spiritually at enmity against God. St. Paul writes in Romans 8:7-8,

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Despite the clear biblical teaching of man's total depravity, the so called *opinio legis* fights against God's Word in the hearts of religious people. The *opinio legis*, or legal opinion is that if we are to be saved from sin, death, and the power of the devil, we must do something to accomplish this. Since the Bible speaks so much of God's grace and our spiritual inability, even the most worksrighteous of the worksrighteous will give most of the credit for a man's salvation to God, but the germ of synergism worms its way into this topic the way a tick buries itself under your skin. It is by God's grace, but . . . you must do this or that or the other thing. Your faith becomes an act of your will, an act that serves as the catalyst for you being justified by God, reconciled to God, and restored to fellowship with God.

If the fellowship between God and man that existed in the beginning is to be reestablished, God must be the One to do so because sinful man cannot do it. This entails both the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ reconciles us to God by dying for us, taking away our sin, propitiating God, and by his death and resurrection procuring for us God's pardon and declaration of full fellowship with us. The Holy Spirit reconciles us to God by bringing what Christ has done for us and making it ours. He does so by means of speaking. The speaking takes on various forms. There is the proclamation of the gospel. There is baptism, where the word of God is joined to water and we are united with God by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. There is the Lord's Supper where God gives us to eat and to drink the very body and blood of Jesus by which our salvation was procured. There is the absolution, whether corporate, private, formal, informal, wherever God tells us he forgives us all our sins for Christ's sake. There is the mutual conversation and consolation we give and receive with fellow Christians when we share with one another the treasures of the gospel. The gospel in whatever form it takes is how the Holy Spirit takes what Christ has wrought for us and gives it to us.

This means that the gospel is how God declares fellowship with us. Every pastor is a preacher, and you cannot preach unless you are a theologian. If you're not a theologian, you aren't competent to preach or be a pastor. Farmers have farmer language, fishermen have fisherman language, mechanics have mechanics language, and theologians have their own theological jargon. Jargon is often shorthand. It uses words and terms that entail much broader meaning than what they literally mean. For example, preaching the gospel. To take this in a very narrow sense would mean that it is happening only when the preacher is verbalizing the words that tell us that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, or something to that effect. But we know that preaching the gospel also entails preaching the law, preaching whatever the Bible says about whatever topic it is addressing, talking about God informally, catechizing, praying at the bedside, answering questions about God and the church in someone's living room, and the list goes on. Everything the pastor says is related to the preaching of the gospel. The pastor's duties are defined by the means of grace that God has called him to administer.

This gospel preaching is how the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Christ Jesus in the one true faith. Let's deal briefly with each of these words and see what they say about our fellowship with God.

Calls. The call of the Holy Spirit in the gospel is grounded in the fact, the theological fact, that God is at peace with us. What we sing is true. "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled." Unless this were so, there would be no gospel by which the Holy Spirit could call us. The call doesn't come directly, as in an ecstatic enthusiastic experience. The call comes with the words of the gospel. Without those words there is no Holy Spirit and no call. The call is to faith. We cannot believe in Jesus by our own reason or strength. We cannot have faith. The call of the Holy Spirit is the call to faith. Faith that God is not angry with us, is not estranged from us, is on our side, is one with us, and wants us to enjoy communion with Him.

Gathers. We'll be talking about this more fully in the second session: the Christian's fellowship with Christians, that is the Christian's fellowship with the church. The believers, the saints, those who are justified through faith, who enjoy fellowship with God are gathered together. They don't live lives separate from other Christians. They are one body. Their fellowship with one another is a feature of their fellowship with God who has called them by the gospel.

Enlightens. Man's innate spiritual blindness prevents him from enjoying fellowship with God. He cannot know God as God truly is until he knows God in Christ and Christ in his humble and vicarious obedience and suffering. When enlightened by God's grace, we are brought into fellowship with the God who has enlightened us. God forgives us. This enlightens us. If you do not know that you are forgiven by God, you are spiritually blind. You must try and fail to propitiate Him who cannot be propitiated except by Jesus Christ who is the propitiation for the sins of the world. Trying, you stumble in darkness, unable to see the destruction into which you are going. Then God graciously forgives you for Christ's sake and you are enlightened.

Sanctifies. Sanctification in the broad sense entails both justification and sanctification. God forgives us all our sins for Christ's sake. He reckons us to be righteous. He imputes to us Christ's righteousness and tells us we are righteous. Only a good tree can bear good fruit. Only those who have been saved by God's grace alone through faith alone can do the good works that God foreordained that they should do. Being good is not doing good. Being is not doing. You are what you are before you've done anything. You don't become by doing. What nonsense! I choose to be a woman so I'm a woman? I choose to be six feet tall and 175 pounds, so I am? What utter foolishness! No, you are what you are and then you do what you do, and you do what you do because you are what you are. You don't become what you are by doing.

When God justifies us, he isn't pretending. It's not just as if. It's a fact. God says you are righteous. That makes you righteous. Because he said so. And because you are righteous you can do righteous things. And God loves the righteous things you do as his righteous child.

May God bestow on us His grace and favor
To please Him with our behavior.

Yes, our behavior pleases him. Because we have done good. Not well. Maybe not even particularly competent. But good. How can we do good? By being good. If God makes you good, he makes what you do good. We can indeed please him with our behavior! So, who was the wise guy who chose to change the words "please Him with our behavior" into "follow Christ our Savior"? Why remove these words? Is it because we are ashamed of the doctrine of sanctification? Is it because we are crypto antinomians? Are we afraid of confessing that the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with love?

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we

stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. . . . Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:1-2,5

You cannot separate being justified through faith and having the love of God poured out into your heart. We keep cause and effect properly distinguished. Justification is the cause of sanctification. Sanctification is not the cause of justification. But justification produces sanctification. The same Spirit who calls us to faith, the faith that receives God's gracious verdict of justification for Christ's sake, is the Spirit who pours the love of God into our hearts. We must distinguish justification from sanctification, but we may not separate them. If we do, not only will we distort the gospel beyond recognition, but we will nullify entirely what God's Word teaches us about our fellowship with God.

Fellowship with God and sanctification are pretty much the same thing. Just different ways of describing it. Fellowship in English is the translation of the Greek word *κοινωνία*. It means sharing or participation. It is often translated as communion. Two or more become one. We use the word communion to refer to the relationship between the sacramental elements and the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. St. Paul writes,

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

There is communion between the earthly elements and Christ's body and blood. There is communion between the communicants, the communion of saints. There is communion between the Christians and God. Fellowship is communion.

The holy God cannot commune with sin. He has no fellowship with sin. The holy God bore sin in his body on the tree. In this way holiness conquered sin. When we are justified, we are brought into fellowship with the holy God. He enables us to do holy deeds. They are holy by God's reckoning, though the world thinks nothing of them. That's because the world's values are stuck in the mire of selfishness, idolatry, pride, and spiritual blindness. Just as the sanctification of the Christian is not acknowledged by the world, neither is the Christian's fellowship with God.

Sanctification is not visible to men. Man can no more see the holiness of our works as Christians than he can see the fellowship we have with the holy God in whose name we do them. Sanctification is not visible. But sanctification entails doing good. The good that we do is visible. The world can see that. Not the holiness before God that requires the forgiveness of sins. But the goodness according to natural law, accessible even in these days of subjectivism, agnosticism, and relativism. Showing kindness is quite obviously good, even to the unregenerate. Of course, the source of that kindness remains invisible to the human eye. Only the eye of faith can see it.

This brings us to a feature of our fellowship with God that is both a joy and a burden. The Christian who has been brought into fellowship with God by means of God's Word loves God's Word. To love God is to love what He says. What God says teaches us. Teaching is doctrine. To love God is to love the pure doctrine. Indeed, to claim to love God while denigrating the truth of His Word and criticizing those who contend for it is a very hollow claim. God is known by His Word. Whatever god is not the God of the Bible is not God at all but an idol. Fellowship with God is to be loved by God and to love the God who loves us. When we love God, we love what he says.

We must rightly understand the relationship between our fellowship with God and our detestation of all false doctrine. We hate false doctrine because we love God. God has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. He has sanctified us by his truth. The Savior who has saved us is himself the way, the truth, and the life. How can we love the God who has loved us without hating the lies that are told about him?

Let's get specific. If we love God, we hate the teaching that Jesus didn't die for everyone, but only for the elect. If we love God, we hate the teaching that our own free will contributes to our salvation. If we love God, we hate all forms of synergism and worksrighteousness. If we love God, we hate the historical critical method or any other method of biblical interpretation that treats his written Word as if it is merely the word of men. If we love God we hate religious unionism, feminism, the dogma that man evolved from the animals, and the name it and claim it health wealth gospel of the religious hucksters on T.V. If we love God, we hate the papacy as an institution of the devil. If we love God, we hate all attacks on his holiness, righteousness, goodness, and grace. If you lie about my wife or my child, don't expect an invitation to dinner. If you lie about my God, don't expect any fellowship with me.

A story about my dad that we love to tell in our family is about when he had spent a day at some theological conference that many heterodox theologians attended, he returned home, got ready for bed, and before lying down to go to sleep said to my mother, "Hell is listening to false doctrine." Then he went to sleep. So true! Hell is listening to false doctrine. And heaven is listening to the pure doctrine. That's what fellowship with God is all about. He says words that fill our hearts with joy, that strengthen our souls, sustain our faith, give us hope when we're discouraged, empower us to forgive those rotten so and so's who have done us wrong and don't care they've done it, that prepare us to die without fear because we know that the wages of our sin has been paid for by Christ our Savior and holding onto him we can die with confidence that we will spend eternity in joyful, holy, innocent, fellowship with our gracious God. That's why we love the pure doctrine so! And that's why we hate false doctrine. Only those who share this fellowship with us understand what I'm talking about. How can you talk of love while hating false doctrine? How can you not hate false doctrine when you have experienced God's love? Where did that love come from? How do I know what it is? Where is it to be found? How can I have it? The pure doctrine of God's holy Word is the source of pure and holy love. Those who don't approve of condemning false doctrine don't know what love is or where it comes from. Now there is, to be sure, a dead orthodoxy that feigns love for God's Word but is nothing more than an empty, boastful, bravado of orthodoxy. This is the "orthodoxy" that does not love. That

trumps mercy with judgment, and rests in its own rightness rather than in the righteousness of Christ. We'll talk about that in the next session.