

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 18 and POWER POINT 18:

VOCATION: THE SPIRITUALITY OF ORDINARY LIFE

The MASKS of GOD:

1. A major controversy in Luther's day, could a person be a judge, executioner or soldier. After all, the Bible says, "You shall Not Kill," A judge may have to apply the death penalty, and an executioner carry it out. And soldiers in battle are called to kill-not forgive-their enemies. Luther said that it's true that a Christian should not take another's life. God does have that authority. He does through the lawful, vocation of judges, executioners and soldiers, In the treatise, "*Whether Soldiers Too Can Be Saved*," (1526), Luther concludes that being a soldier is a way of serving/loving their neighbor.
2. In personal relationships, soldiers are to forgive, however in protecting their country, their vocation allows them to fight/kill in the battle field. Being a soldier is a holy order, a ministry of love: Luther expounds; "*So, because it is from God that a soldier receives his fitness to do battle, he may serve therewith, serving with his skill and craft whoever desires his services; and he may accept wages for his labor. For his too is a vocation which issues from the law of love.*"
3. Similarly, a father's vocation of protecting his family may use force to do so. A doctor's vocation is to heal, not kill (ruling out euthanasia). A mother's vocation is to nurture her children, (ruling out abortion). Some might think that a high view of governing authorities and even the military opens the door for tyranny. As the next chapter will show this is not the case at all. Those who sin in their vocations, who violate God' intention for that vocation and who fail the tests of selfless service of love of neighbor, are answerable to correction and the wrath of God. The point for now, is that God really does exercise authority through human beings acting in vocation. There is a divine authority in lawful governments, and divine authority in parenting.
4. A corollary to the notion that each vocation has its divinely appointed sphere is that problems arise when people try to act outside of their vocation. Again, consider the spectacle of me trying to repair electrical appliances. When we work outside of our vocations, that is without regards to our God given abilities, inclinations and stations in life—we usually fail miserably, or more seriously, violate the moral law.
5. It is possible and common to pursue occupations in which one has no aptitude and thus no vocation. EV had college students who pursued vocations and chased majors in college based upon those that paid the most, regardless which gifts God has given to them. They turn themselves into bankers, engineers and managers, hate their jobs, and not being very good at what they do. Their true vocation may be music or art, but they are trying to be "practical," as if vocation were self -chosen and deny God given gifts to pursue talents they really don't have. Here are people in the teaching profession who do not really have gifts that enable them to be good teachers. There are politicians who just are not cut out to be rulers. Though if they are in those stations, they should consider that they do have a calling and responsibility to do the best they can. They would be better to build on their own specific gifts.
6. More serious confusions come when those with one vocation trespass on the prerogatives of another vocation. Again private citizens have no right to "take the law into their own hands."

Nor do rulers of the state have the right to take over the rearing of children, which is the vocation of parents. Luther was particularly vehement when earthly rulers presumed to tell pastors what to preach expressing himself in a way that should put to rest the accusation that he was servile to secular rulers: “You fool,” he addressing the prince, “You simpleton, look to your own vocation; don’t take to preaching, but let your pastor do that.”

THE PASTORAL VOCATION:

7. The office of pastor is a special vocation, not merely in God’s earthly Kingdom, but in His spiritual kingdom. Certainly before God, the pastoral vocation is no more meritorious than that of the farmer, the factory worker or other secular vocation. L Evangelicals were the first to promote the notion of “The priesthood of all believers,” that all Christians can have a personal access to God through Christ. And yet L has always had a high view of the pastoral office.
8. In the order of confession and absolution, the traditional L liturgy has the pastor say these words after the congregation confesses that “we are by nature sinful and unclean”: “Upon this confession, I by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the word.....”
9. Non L are often shocked at the notion that the Pastor forgives sins, but his ability to do so is simply the proclamation of the Gospel, his ability to “announce the grace of God.” He is forgiving sin not by his own powers but in the name of Christ. The members of the congregation can be assured of forgiveness of sins insofar as they have repented (“upon this your profession,”) and have faith, not in the pastor, but in God’s Word, the Gospel of Christ that he proclaims. Nevertheless, the pastor is a concrete-one might say sacramental-vehicle for that message of forgiveness. L Small Catechism says that we are to believe the pastor’s forgiveness as if it came from Christ Himself. The pastor is acting “in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ.” That is to say, he is a mask of God.
10. The implication of the pastor’s ministry of Word and Sacrament, what goes on in church, will be explored much more deeply in the next two chapters. Other vocations are noted to have more to do with God’s Earthly Kingdom; the pastoral office deals with the Heavenly Kingdom. The former can wield the sword, said Luther, but the pastor wields the Word. Pastors are not to force, coerce or manipulate anyone into belief; they must trust the Word! They are to preach the Word w/o compromise, even if it condemns the policies and power systems of the world, but they are never to become political, this would trespass upon the vocation of earthly rulers. The pastor’s vocation is to call people into a Kingdom that will not pass away.
11. God baptizes through the hands of pastors. Christ presides over His supper, the pastor distributes the bread and wine. It is God’s Word that rings out during the sermon. L pastors wear robes and vestments and collars to symbolize that his human being is no different from his parishioners, but is clothed in an office, in which He must act in the stead and command of God.
12. Laypeople also serve the church. They use their abilities, talents and their vocations for the good of the community of faith. Administering the property, serving on boards, and the like are necessary for any institution. Laypeople can proclaim the good news of Christ’s forgiveness, primarily operating in their own vocation. Parents evangelize their children. At work, relationships are formed with colleagues., who in the course of friendship and common work, can be introduced to the G. God’s Word extends into the world through vocation. More good stuff on this next week!