

# Issues, Etc.™

JOURNAL



*The Not-So-Great Commission  
Part One*

by Todd Wilken

*Wittenberg Trail:  
Lutheranism, Just In Time*

by Kelly Klages

Summer, 2011



Dear *Journal* Reader,

I have never written about the "Great Commission" before. I avoided it. Now I know why. Most of what is written about those famous verses in Matthew 28 isn't about those verses, but about the authors' latest ideas for growing the Church or making disciples. In this *Journal*, I attempt to write about what Jesus actually said in the the Great Commission. It has proven quite a task. So, below you will find part one of "The Not-So-Great Commission."

*Lutheranism, Just In Time* is our "Wittenberg Trail" feature by Kelly Klages. Kelly's story is an old one: years spent in the disillusionment of a Baptist theology and para-church "fellowships." It is also new: finding the certainty of Lutheran theology, first on the Internet, then in the Lutheran Church.

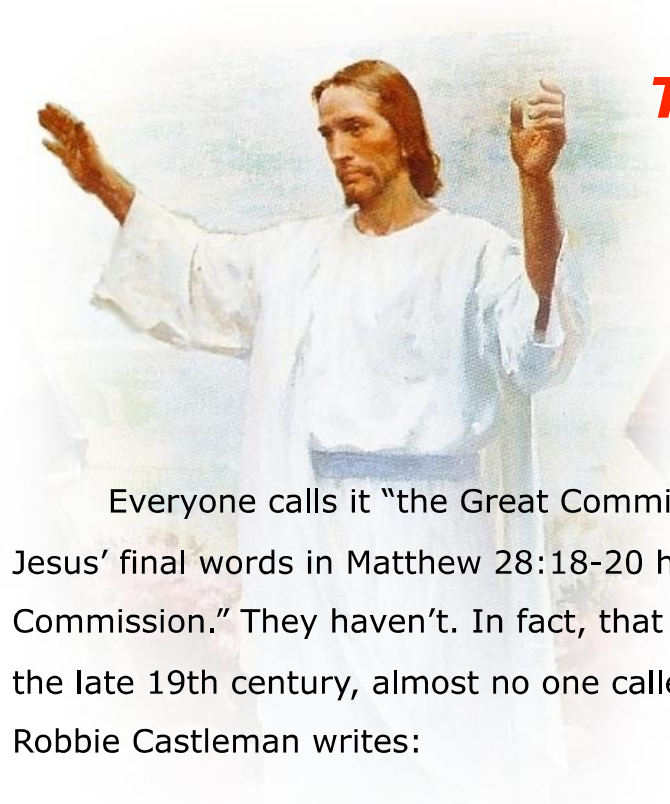
Also, you'll find our growing list of supporting congregations in the Find a Church section at the end of the *Journal*.

Enjoy the *Journal*.

Wir sind alle Bettler,

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

A large, stylized handwritten signature in a cursive script, appearing to read "Todd Wilken". The signature is written in a light gray color and is positioned below the typed name.



# **The Not-So-Great Commission, Part One**

by Todd Wilken

Everyone calls it “the Great Commission.” And you may assume that Jesus’ final words in Matthew 28:18-20 have always been called “the Great Commission.” They haven’t. In fact, that label is relatively recent. Up until the late 19th century, almost no one called it “the Great Commission.” Dr. Robbie Castleman writes:

*It turns out that this passage may have got its summary label from a Dutch missionary Justinian von Welz (1621-88), but it was Hudson Taylor, nearly 200 years later, who popularized the use of "The Great Commission". So, it seems like Welz or some other Post-Reformation missionary probably coined the term "The Great Commission"...<sup>1</sup>*

No one seems to know exactly where the term came from. Regardless, it has stuck. It has done more than that; it has taken on a life of its own.

The aforementioned James Hudson Taylor, a late 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary (and mission-related quote factory) famously said, “The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.” But notice something. Hudson didn’t really say *what* the Great Commission is, did he?

I think this is part of the problem. We talk about the Great Commission all the time. But I often wonder if that label still refers to the words Jesus spoke in Matthew 28:18-20, or to something else.

I once heard a former president of my denomination preach a sermon urging his hearers to carry out the Great Commission. He did so without making a single reference to the text of Matthew 28. This is not uncommon. I have read entire articles on the Great Commission that never bother to quote, much less explain the biblical text to which the label refers.

What has happened? Matthew 28:18-20 has been pigeonholed. Jesus' famous last words have been replaced by an idea of a Great Commission that may, or may not have anything to do with those words themselves. This isn't good.

The result is that most modern champions of the Great Commission actually deny much of what Matthew 28:18-20 says. As a result, their "Great Commission" isn't so great. I'll prove it.



## **No Authority**

Jesus began the Great Commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This part is often left out, as though it were mere prologue. It isn't. In fact, the first question any discussion of the Great Commission must answer is: What authority was Jesus talking about?

The easy assumption is that Jesus was saying, "I'm the boss." Then, he gave us our assignment, our marching orders. But this superficial reading ignores the context of the Great Commission.



Authority is a theme that runs through all of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus taught with authority (7:29), acted under authority (8:9), gave his disciples authority (10:1), distinguished his authority from that of the world (20:25), and had his authority called into question (21:23-27).

In the Great Commission, Jesus claimed all authority "in heaven and on the earth." There is a "heaven and earth" connection in Matthew's Gospel that modern-day champions of the Great Commission overlook. In Matthew 18:18 Jesus told his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Why is this connection overlooked? Probably because Jesus was talking about the authority to forgive sins. The modern-day champions of the Great Commission simply don't know what to do with that.

But the "heaven and earth" forgiveness connection is unavoidable. It's also found in Matthew 9:2-8:

*And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, **"Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."** And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? **But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, **who had given such authority to men.***

What is this authority that Jesus exercised "in heaven and on the earth," and that he conferred on his disciples? It was not some general, divine authority; it was the specific authority to forgive sins.<sup>2</sup>

The second question any discussion of the Great Commission must answer is, Why does Jesus say that this authority "has been given to me"?

In fact, the very first word out of Jesus' mouth in the Greek of verse 18 is Ἐδόθη, "has been given."

Jesus is God. He already possessed all authority. What does it mean that Jesus has been given all authority? Well, it's not that Jesus *didn't* have this authority before, and now had it. That's not the point. Jesus was saying something else. Jesus was saying, "This authority has been given to me, *therefore*, I am giving it to you." He did exactly the same thing after his resurrection in John 20:

*"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (John 20:21-23; see also John 5:22-23, 26-27)*

Jesus had been given "authority on the earth to forgive sins" (Matthew 9) and he gave this same authority to his Church. Why? To make disciples.

It's all in that little word in Greek, οὖν that begins verse 19. We translate it "therefore." This little conjunction cannot be ignored, as it often is in the case of the Great Commission. This word connects everything in verse 18 to everything in verse 19. This word connects Jesus' authority to forgive sins in heaven and on earth with the Great Commission. Jesus commanded that disciples be made based upon, and using his own divine authority to forgive sins.

The Great Commission is nothing less than Jesus conferring to his Church his divine authority to make disciples by conferring his divine authority to forgive sins. A failure to understand this leads to a complete misreading of the Great Commission.

The authority to make disciples IS the authority to forgive sin, and vice versa. Without that sin-forgiving authority, the Church has no authority or ability to make disciples.

However, that's not how the modern champions of the Great Commission read the verse. For them, making disciples isn't about Jesus authority or forgiving sin; it's about influence, persuasion and closing to deal. And, you don't need divine authority, or even the forgiveness of sins to do that. You only need the best plan, technique and execution. This explains why modern champions of the Great Commission put so much emphasis on *the process* of making disciples. For them, **it's all about the process**. Just a few examples should suffice, from none other than the leading lights of the Great Commission today, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church, and Rick Warren of Saddleback Church:



*People go through **a process** in coming to Christ—a process. And I believe in and respect that **process**.*<sup>3</sup>

*When you honor and validate **the process** people go through in coming to Christ, many of them will be willing to get started. Your approach tells them you really understand what they're going through as they take those difficult steps toward faith.*<sup>4</sup>

*If we push or rush them, they'll back out of **the process**. But if we allow them to move at their own*

*pace, we'll be able to help them gradually progress until, eventually, God brings them to the point of crossing the bridge and trusting Christ.*<sup>5</sup>

*Jesus had **a process** by which He took people from no faith in Christ to deep disciple. The very first words of Jesus that He says to His*

*disciples are "Come and see." Now that's the entry point for faith. ... And from "Come and see," He took them through consistent steps. ...Churches have not understood that commitment is **sequential, systematic, and processed**.*

*How do you get people from "Come and see" to "come and die"? ...There are classes, there are covenants, there are commitments, there are cells, there's coaching. Jesus used one to group, one on one, one to large group, and all of these have to be built into discipleship... Most churches don't have a **systematic, sequential process** by which they move people from unbeliever to member, to maturing member, to minister, to missionary. But that's what we've been doing for 28 years... that only happens when you've got **an intentional process** to move them through.<sup>6</sup>*

Notice what is missing: Jesus' authority to forgive sins. The disciple-making "process" has replaced Jesus' divine authority given to the Church to forgive sins. And that's just the beginning. What else is missing from the not-so-Great Commission of today?

## **No Disciples**

The vocabulary of Christian Church has been changing. Old, biblical words are being replaced with new, sociological ones. We used to talk about sinners, now we talk about seekers. We used to talk about unbelievers, now we talk about the unchurched. We used to talk about repentance, now we talk about response.

Willow Creek and churches like it have pioneered the new vocabulary and its definitions. Jesus said, "Make disciples." But Willow Creek's goal is "to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ."<sup>7</sup> Is there a difference? Let's see.

The Willow Creek Association teaches that church members should be classified within four "segments" along a "spiritual growth continuum." This continuum includes both non-Christians and Christians, and is measured by

“higher levels of spiritual attitudes” and an “increase in spiritual behaviors.”

The four segments are:

- 1) Exploring Christ: “I believe in God, but I am not sure about Christ. My faith is not a significant part of my life.”
- 2) Growing in Christ: “I believe in Jesus and I am working on what it means to get to know him.”
- 3) Close to Christ: “I feel really close to Christ and depend on him daily for guidance.”
- 4) Christ-Centered: “My relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in my life. It guides everything I do.”

People at the top of this spiritual continuum are referred to as “fully devoted” Christ followers.<sup>8</sup>

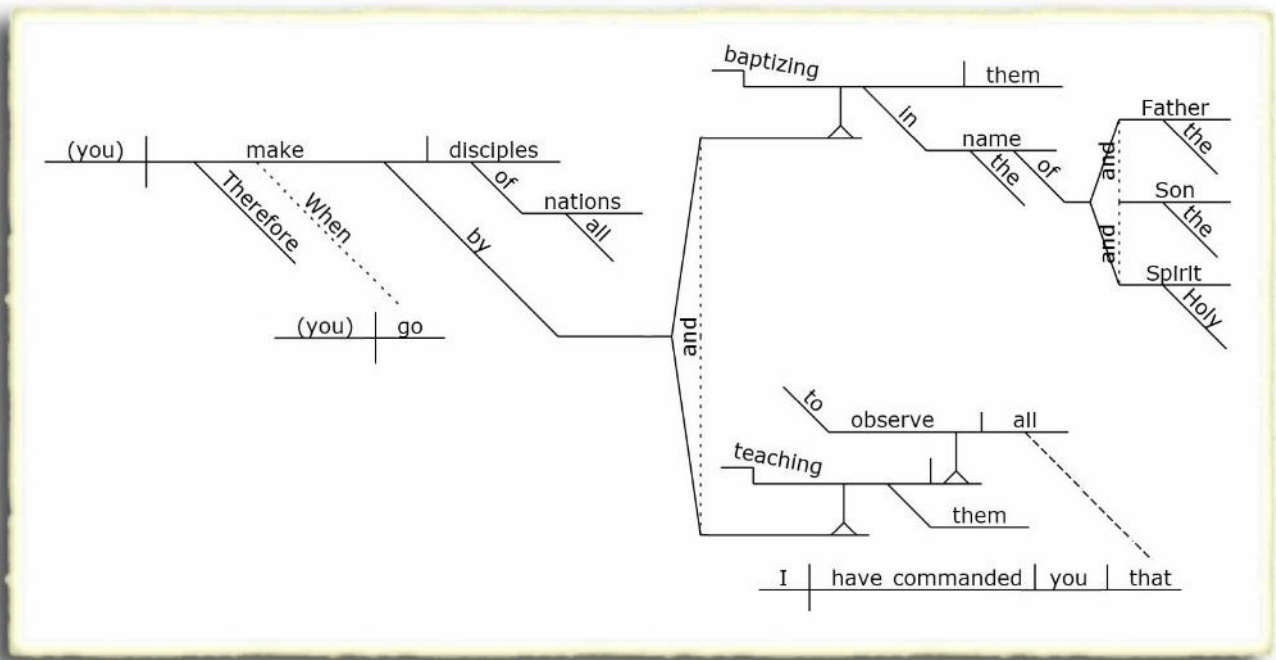
Notice what is missing: Disciples. How can disciples be missing from the church-growth gurus’ reading of the Great Commission? Disciples in the New Testament are believers, and all believers are disciples. Yet, the modern champions of the Great Commission have divorced “disciple” from “believer.” More than that, it’s unclear where along their spiritual continuum a person is made a disciple, or if that word even applies anymore.



Also notice what has taken the place of disciples. Lots of adjectives: “exploring, growing, close, devoted, sold-out, etc.” The Great Commission contains absolutely no such adjectives. There are no exploring, growing, close, devoted or sold out disciples, just disciples. Again, disciples are believers and all believers are disciples.

## No Baptism

What was Matthew 28:18-20 before it was dubbed “the Great Commission?” It may surprise you to learn that it was considered the “words of institution” for Christian Baptism.<sup>9</sup> Yet this shouldn’t surprise anyone. Baptizing and teaching are essential to the Great Commission; it’s right there in the grammar of Jesus’ words. Let’s diagram the sentence.



Diagramming verse 19 allows us to visualize the grammatical relationships within the verse. This is very revealing. There is a lot more happening in this verse than most English translations show, or most champions of the Great Commission admit.

Diagramming verse 19 also allows us to translate the verse correctly:

*Therefore, when you go, make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*



This sounds a little different from the Great Commission you're familiar with, doesn't it? It should. It isn't that most English translations are incorrect; but most fail clearly to reflect these grammatical relationships within the text. And this is crucial for understanding exactly what Jesus is saying.

What is different about this reading of the Great Commission? First, the word "go" is not translated as an imperative, or a command. That's because it is not an imperative verb; it is a participle, "When you go". The reason it is usually translated as an imperative is that this participle is linked to the imperative verb, "make disciples."<sup>10</sup> That's fine. But, I want to highlight the fact that the word "go" is not the main verb of the sentence; grammatically, it cannot be. The main verb is "make disciples."

This means that the Great Commission is not about going; it is about making disciples. This means that the Great Commission is not something that happens away from, or apart from the Church. This means that the proclamation of the Gospel in church is just as much "mission" and "making disciples" as the proclamation of the Gospel outside the church.

Second, you will notice the phrases, "by baptizing them ...by teaching them." These two words are also participles. In this case, they specify *the means by* which the action of the main verb "make disciples" takes place.

This is very important. **Baptizing and teaching are not incidental or secondary to making disciples. They are not actions separate from making disciples. Baptizing and teaching are how disciples are made.** This is hardly a new insight, Dr. Robert Kolb has written:

*This command consists of an imperative and three auxiliary verbs, which are participles, The first, "going," presumes that his followers will find places to which God sends them: "when you have gotten*

*where you are headed” is the force of this aorist participle. The command itself is simple, “make disciples.” How is this done? The command is explained through the use of two present participles, “baptizing” and “teaching.” ...Baptizing is clearly God’s action, as Jesus had explained it (John 3:5) and as Paul (Titus 3:5) and Peter (1 Pet. 3:21) would. God creates disciples.<sup>11</sup>*

By contrast, Bill Hybels writes about the Great Commission:

*The second aspect of this challenge comes from the words, “go and make disciples of all nations.” It’s clear that Jesus wasn’t expecting that to happen through diplomacy or political effort. Rather, it would come about as a result of their actual going and getting in close proximity to the people who they hoped to influence. In doing so, they’d have the opportunity to start relationships and naturally influence the people they’ve gotten to know. Next, Jesus emphasized that as they made disciples they should teach them.<sup>12</sup>*

Notice that Baptism is missing, just left out entirely. How can Hybels ignore Jesus’ words about Baptism while reading of the Great Commission? Simple, Hybels holds an unscriptural view of Baptism. According to this view, Baptism has no necessary connection to making disciples. At best, it is a symbolic ordinance to be observed after disciples have been made. Hybels doesn’t know what to do with Baptism in the Great Commission. So, he just skips it.

For his part, Rick Warren at least includes Baptism in his explanation of the Great Commission, but explicitly denies that Baptism does anything in regard to making disciples:

*For years I wondered why Jesus’ Great Commission gives the same prominence to baptism as it does to the great tasks of evangelism and edification. Why is baptism so important? Then I realized it is because it symbolizes God’s second purpose of your life: participating in the fellowship of God’s eternal family. Baptism doesn’t **make** you a member of God’s family; only faith in Christ does that.<sup>13</sup>*

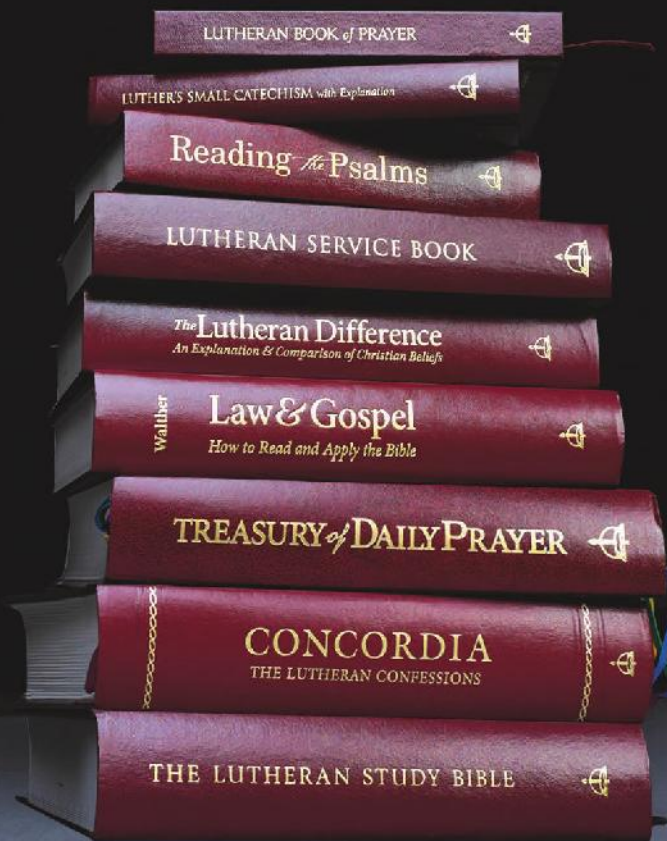
Hybels omits Baptism from his reading of the Great Commission. Warren includes it, but says that it has nothing to do with making disciples. Both deny what the Great Commission actually says.

## **Next Time in Part 2, "Not All"**

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- <sup>1</sup> Castleman, Robbie, "The Last Word: The Great Commission: Ecclesiology" *Themelios*, 32/3, November 2007, pp. 68-70. It's interesting to note that Welz was born into an Austrian Lutheran family, but later experienced a "conversion" and wrote critically of Lutheranism. Some even regard him as an influence prior to the birth of Pietism. See Mulholland, Kenneth, "From Luther To Carey: Pietism and the Modern Missionary Movement" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 156, January-March, 1999. see also Peters, Paul, "The Fruits of Luther's Mission-Mindedness," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1838> pp. 5-6.
- <sup>2</sup> See the Lutheran Confessions, TR 31.
- <sup>3</sup> G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services, Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996, p. 106
- <sup>4</sup> Hybels, Bill and Mittelberg, Mark, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, p. 203.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159
- <sup>6</sup> Rick Warren, "Rick Warren Interview" April 24, 2008. <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/369989>
- <sup>7</sup> Willow Creek Community Church, "The Heart of Willow Creek," [www.willowcreeknorthshore.org/attachments/1258\\_heartofwillow.pdf](http://www.willowcreeknorthshore.org/attachments/1258_heartofwillow.pdf), see also <http://www.willowcreek.org/story.aspx?storyid=35>.
- <sup>8</sup> Willow Creek Association, Reveal Spiritual Life Survey, "Key Findings" [http://www.revealnow.com/key\\_findings.asp](http://www.revealnow.com/key_findings.asp).
- <sup>9</sup> AP IX, 2; SC IV, 4; LC Shorter Preface, 20-22; IV, 3-4.
- <sup>10</sup> This is perfectly legitimate. The same thing occurs in the Resurrection account earlier in the same chapter, verse 7, "Go quickly, tell his disciples..." The same participle-imperative relationship is found in the "Lesser Commission" in Matthew 10:7 ("As you go, preach...") and in Mark's version of the Great Commission in Mark 16:15 ("Going... preach").
- <sup>11</sup> Kolb, Robert, *Make Disciples, Baptizing: God's Gift of New Life and Christian Witness*, Concordia Seminary, 1997, p. 23.
- <sup>12</sup> Hybels and Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, p. 215.
- <sup>13</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002, p. 120 (emphasis original).

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# *Lutheranism, Just In Time*

by Kelly Klages

My background is in the Southern Baptist church. As long as I can remember, my parents brought me to Sunday School and to church with them. They made sure I knew my prayers and understood the importance of the Bible. For that, I can be ever grateful to them. My goal is not to look down on my church past as though there had been nothing good there, or to generalize about all Southern Baptists, but to explain how rediscovering the Gospel led naturally to an appreciation of the Lutheran faith.

If I were to describe the Baptist church of my childhood, it would probably include the fact that it seemed very— surprise— southern American. The hymns were bouncy or sort of schmaltzy. Democrats and other such immoral types were denounced from the pulpit. The church did cook-outs, patriotic songs, and lots of family-friendly “fellowship” together. If I were to sum up the bottom-line themes that I heard from the pulpit week in and week out, I’d go with something like “what the Bible teaches about the value of Christian obedience, personal responsibility, and individual freedom.” With liberty and justice for all! And with an altar call at the end, urging people to ask Jesus into their hearts.

My own “decision for Jesus” had come at the age of 9 or 10; my full-immersion baptism was on February 4, 1991. I had grown up as a bit of a



church goody-goody, that kid who aced all the Bible verse memorizing games and *seemed* so pious. I was curious about God and wanted answers to the important questions in life; I also saw some selfish value in appearing to others to be a good, devout person. Our church prided itself on being “Bible-based” and being pointedly un-Catholic. Creeds, councils, and church history in general were held in deep suspicion. We were taught that Catholics didn’t read their Bibles, but only followed empty rituals and traditions of men. As far as I knew, there were only three kinds of churches in the world: evangelicals (mostly of the Baptist variety), Roman Catholics, and left-wing mainline churches that hardly believed in anything. My options seemed pretty clear.

As I grew older, Bible study and pious churchly life continued. I attended a number of in-depth *Precepts* studies, which were supposed to teach you to read the Bible “inductively” as you used concordances and supposedly discovered answers for yourself. Kay Arthur would promise us that God would bless us for our obedience and the time we spent on our homework.

Every couple weeks in Sunday School, our lesson would include a 1-10 chart where you were supposed to grade yourself on how you did on any given virtue that week, based on the study. I got more involved in contemporary Christian music as a young teenager, and was encouraged to participate in a number of capacities as a worship leader. (Schmaltzy hymns had given way to schmaltzy ’80s soft rock tunes.) The point of all of this— from Bible study, to worship, to the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper— was to live in obedience to God, to use our talents to express our personal piety and feelings toward God, and to do our best to do what Jesus did. What happened at the old rugged cross was left on a hill far away. Oh, it sometimes got a hat-tip during altar calls. We remembered it during the



Lord's Supper, as we sat there and felt bad about our sins as we had our crackers and juice. It definitely played a part in evangelism and mission work, as far as getting new people in the door was concerned. But for us Christians, it was the entranceway, and now we were to get to work on God's Law of loving God and loving our neighbor. Since we were Christians, we could certainly do it, with Jesus as our good example and the Spirit as our helper. And if you screwed up *too* badly, well... maybe you needed to rededicate your life to God. "Once saved, always saved," so maybe you were never really in the door to begin with...

How does a person manage in that kind of environment? I knew I was a raging hypocrite who often hid behind pious lies. Sometimes my faith was weak, despite my many church activities. How did I know that I really meant it when I gave my life to Jesus? How many works were enough to prove that my saving faith in Jesus was really of the genuine variety? I don't know how others dealt with this personal dilemma, but I managed to stave off despair with a level of self-righteousness. I immersed myself in evangelical culture, did the small group Bible studies, the service projects, all the stuff the pastor would tell me were signs of being a good Christian. If I could prove to myself that the fruit of faith was blossoming, maybe I could rest secure. But still, the pastor seemed to end each of his sermons with "Do you need to be more sold out to Jesus? Have you *really* committed everything to him? Let's pray..." How could I ever honestly pretend that I had fully surrendered and totally committed myself to Jesus when it was obvious that I kept sinning? The road to hell was paved with good intentions...

A turning point in my teenage faith coincided with the death of CCM artist Rich Mullins. I read some of his writings and they blew my mind. He blasted all of us good, pious evangelicals. He blasted the very industry that had put his songs on worship screens across the country— much to his



embarrassment, so it would seem. And what he talked about, endlessly, was the grace of God freely given to us in the death of Jesus. It was the simple Gospel, and I was hungry for it: forgiveness with no strings attached, no pretending to be better than I really was. Don't get me wrong; we did hear the message of the cross in church. I recall an interim pastor of ours who preached it frequently. But it was most often presented as being for

unbelievers, to convert them. Once you were "in the door" and had truly dedicated yourself, you were to get cracking on exercising those twin cardinal virtues of Obedience and Personal Responsibility. This focus on Gospel dependence for the *Christian*— still sinner, yet saint— seemed radical to me. I read and re-read Brennan Manning's book, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. God's grace became my new subject of obsession. Almost immediately, it became clear that this focus was not quite in keeping with the kind of stuff that was happening in my own church. In Bible study one morning, the young adult class was having a typical conversation about those evil unbelievers. I'd had those commiserations many times, myself. But it sounded strange this time. My friends were talking about how stupid unbelievers were for not seeing the obvious truth and for making decisions for Jesus (like we all did), and for being so immoral. Hang on— what about grace? Wouldn't we be in the same boat as those unbelievers if God hadn't graciously converted us? Surely we're not saved because we're more obedient decision-makers, or more moral, or smarter than anyone else? That

single conversation dealt a huge blow to my faith in “decision theology.” I couldn’t articulate it at the time or come up with a solution, but in that moment, it became clear that if we said that we were saved in part because of our own good decisions or commitments, then we had reasons for boasting– be it subtle or obviously stated, it was there, and it was ugly.

College provided a number of opportunities and challenges for my faith. I started talking theology with new online friends, including someone who was looking into the Orthodox priesthood, and also a Lutheran seminarian. My college was quite liberal and secular, so I huddled together with fellow Christians of different denominations in our InterVarsity Christian fellowship group. I became very puzzled about Christian fellowship issues in college. On the one hand, my Baptist pastor had taken the word “Baptist” off our church sign, and seemed to minimize doctrinal differences (“secondary” or “non-essential” issues) in the name of being seeker-sensitive. On the other hand, there were those in my IV group who were quite open about things like women’s ordination or the social gospel. Were these things really secondary, relatively unimportant issues if the Bible spoke clearly against them? These differences actually seemed to affect the understanding and proclamation of the very Gospel itself. I had a hard time understanding where I stood with my fellow Christians. This was all very confusing and upsetting.

By my senior year, I was president of our IV group, still on the praise team, and despairing of having made any kind of positive impact at all as a Christian in my four years of college. I skipped out of a meeting one evening to walk alone in the woods, wondering how and where I could experience God’s presence. Maybe ramping up people’s emotions through moving worship music was just a manipulative farce, after all. Trying to discern

God's truth and "the movement of the Spirit" through nature and quiet time wasn't working out too well, either. It felt empty and contrived.

To put it very briefly, the Internet is where I learned about the Lutheran faith. Since I had a good Lutheran friend online, I'd spent a couple of years asking questions on forums and reading what I could get my hands on. Late nights were spent digging through various articles and resources,



including the old *Issues, Etc.* archives. Eventually, I was talked into attending an Adult Instruction Class in a nearby LCMS congregation to see if this faith could truly be my own. By the time I got there, I was practically

Lutheran already. Here's just some of what Lutheranism had to offer that I couldn't wait to get my hands on:

- **Jesus Christ and him crucified for the forgiveness of my sins.** It was everywhere. People wouldn't shut up about it. There was no question that this was the center, the most important tenet of Lutheran teaching. And it was for Christians, too, not just unbelievers.
- **The sacraments and the efficacy of the Word.** Sacraments were confusing to understand at first. I was so used to thinking of Baptism and the Supper as human works. But no, they're works of God to deliver Jesus to *me*. Suddenly all those confusing verses about Baptism in the Bible started making sense. I cannot begin to express how comforting it was to know where to find Jesus for me, for my benefit and my salvation, and to stop relying on my own creative attempts to understand and experience God through emotional highs, mountaintop events, or any other kind of mystical contemplation of my own design.
- **An alternative to decision theology.** When my first Lutheran pastor explained in adult information class about the problems of decision theology and how God saves us single-handedly through

Christ, apart from any will of our own, I wanted to jump up and shout, "That's it!" It was the answer I'd been waiting for: conversion that was truly by grace alone, through faith alone.

- **Historicity.** I'd known basically nothing about the origins of the Baptist church or of modern evangelicalism. I hadn't realized that several teachings of my previous church were very much historical novelties, from popular end-times beliefs to views on worship. The original church of the Reformation, with its ancient creeds and unchanging confession of faith, sounded better to me all the time.

So, you could say that Lutheranism arrived at just the right time to provide solid answers for my own particular crises of young adult faith. I joined the church in 2004 (a year out of college) and went on to marry a Canadian Lutheran pastor. But being a Lutheran isn't the happily-ever-after tale of popular evangelical testimony stories. This faith is tough and earthy, rooted in real life, real sin and real forgiveness. There's no charting your journey to ever-increasing heights of sanctification, no "building your own ministry," no new fads or gimmicks marketed every year or two to serve as proof of the Spirit moving. Faith toward God and love toward your neighbor can look pretty plain and unspectacular most of the time. Lutherans themselves can often be downright baffling! But there is no question that the certainty, the assurance, the very tangible benefits of Jesus crucified for the forgiveness of sins is unparalleled in the Lutheran church. Having the Gospel front and center is exactly what I need, as a sinner who remains ever-dependent on God's grace in Jesus.



*A Baltimore native, Kelly Klages lives in Winkler, Manitoba with her husband, Pastor Alex Klages (Lutheran Church of Canada), and their two children, Anastasia and Micah. She is author of two books: "Water with the Word: A Baptism Q&A," and "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna", a collection of illustrated hymns for children.*

Dear **Issues, Etc.** Listener:

In the name of Jesus, greetings. As the Pentecost season comes to an end, the Church remembers the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. Really, the Reformation isn't only our past; it is the Church's present too. The pure Gospel and Sacraments are constantly reforming the Church to her Biblical roots.

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Thank you for your support of **Issues, Etc.**, past, present and future, and thanks for listening.

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