

## **The Disposition of Grace, I**

I would like to begin our session today by reading a hymn of Ambrose of Milan. Ambrose was the preacher through whom Augustine was converted to Christ. It is from the first century, the century in which the Nicene Creed was produced affirming the full deity of Christ: “God of God, light of light, very God of very God.” And Ambrose’s hymn reflects that theme. This is a prayer to the Son, and it is very appropriate for us as we begin our session. He probably has in mind John 1, where Christ is the light that lighted every man, coming into the world. But let us make this our prayer our own:

*“Oh, splendor of God’s glory bright, from light eternal bringing light, come, pour the Holy Spirit’s ray on all we think or do today. Confirm our will to do the right, and keep our hearts from envy’s blight. Let faith her eager fires renew and hate the false and love the true.” We commit ourselves to you, O Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Be with us now, we pray. Amen.*

Last session we started on the goal of human life, looking at it from the biblical point of view. And the goal of life is God. But, more specifically, we are looking at the various ways that is given in Scriptures. And the overall theme is the glory of God. We are created to reflect God’s glory, so the goal of human life is the glory of God. It can be said to be the controlling purpose of the Christian life, because it affects everything that we do. The key verse is 1 Corinthians 10:31, which says, “So whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God.” Even the mundane things of life have their reference toward God. A parallel passage in Colossians says, “Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by him.” So everything now has a new orientation that we live for Christ’s glory, out of gratitude for what God has done through Christ. Mainly, we should reflect His glory; that is the prime consideration in everything. Now, Paul mentions food and drink in 1 Corinthians 10 because of the issue of things that might affect someone else’s spiritual life, things that are innocent in themselves, neither commanded nor forbidden. Nevertheless, if they cause someone else to go against his conscience, it would not be the loving thing for us to do to parade that in front of him. So Paul brings in the consideration that even in these mundane things that are innocent in themselves, there is a consideration of love for our neighbor. And it is at that point that he says, “Whether you eat or drink, do it all for the glory of God.” He himself says, “I seek not to give any offense unnecessarily to Jews or Greeks. Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.” It is in that context that he points us to the glory of God as the goal of the Christian life. It is the controlling purpose. It literally affects all aspects of our lives. It is the air that we breathe.

When we come to more specific biblical material on what the glory of God means for us, I think that the first place to go is the restoration of the image of Christ. God is glorified in the redemption of His people. What that means, concretely, is that God is glorified as His people are conformed to the image of His Son. The key text is Romans 8:28-30. Let me review this text for us. It begins with one of the most familiar verses in the Scriptures. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” What is the purpose? Verse 29 says, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” That is the goal: to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. That is God’s purpose. That is the purpose to which we are called. Paul expands then on the order of salvation: “Those he predestined he also called, those he called he also justified, those he justified he also glorified.” Glorification is a process that begins in this life as we are transformed into a likeness of Christ from one degree of glory unto another. The goal is the perfect conformity to the likeness of Christ, which does not occur in this life but is the ultimate goal. By God’s grace we begin to reflect His likeness more and more, as we die to sin and

live to righteousness in Christ. So if we talk about what the glory of God means concretely for us, the goal of human life is to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Now, the questions of what the goal of human life is and what kind of persons we ought to be coincide at this point. The kind of persons we ought to be are persons who are Christ-like. And so we cannot make an absolute distinction between goal and persons. At this point at least, they coincide, although the goal is broader than our personal conformity to the image of Christ. That is, for us as persons, the key aspect. It is God's purpose that we be conformed to the image of His Son, and so everything that we think and do now is oriented toward becoming Christ-like. The Christian life has a definite shape as Christ is formed in us. That is what Christian ethics is all about, in terms of the kind of persons we ought to be. With my own translation, Galatians 4:19 reads something like this. Paul is disturbed about the Galatians because they are forsaking justification by faith and substituting some kind of idea of sanctification by law. And he says, "My children, I am enduring labor pains for you all over again until Christ is formed in you." They are in danger of leaving the true way of fulfillment in Christ by some kind of works salvation, some kind of reintroduction of the Law into the Christian life in such a way that it is incompatible with God's free grace in Christ. Paul is concerned about this. But the goal of the Christian life is that Christ may be formed in us. In my book I expand on that theme of the image of God and trace it back to Genesis, and I do not want to repeat it now. But that is the goal, from the point of view of what kinds of persons we ought to be. It is God's purpose, His eternal purpose, that His redeemed people be conformed to the image of His Son. Everything is oriented toward developing that form in us of Christ Himself.

Now, the broader aspects of the goal of human life are captured in the theme of the kingdom of God. One of the great summary texts in the Gospels is Matthew 6:33, which says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." He is getting our priorities straight in terms of what is intrinsically worthy of human pursuit. What goals ought we to pursue in life? Well, Matthew 6:33 answers that question directly: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Okay, that is one way of putting the *summum bonum*, the supreme good, the highest good, the thing that we ought to seek. It is for God's glory; it will conform us to the image of Christ, but the kingdom of God is the broader theme that we need to incorporate into our thinking. The kingdom of God—it has been established in our generation—refers mainly to the reign of God rather than the realm over which He rules. You do not have a reign without a realm, so kingdom is used in the sense of a realm. But when you are reading in the Scriptures about the kingdom of God, try to think first about the reign of God, because it is the in-breaking reign of God into our world, the exercise of God's sovereignty, which He has at all time over all things. The exercise of His sovereignty for the purpose of redemption is the sense in which the kingdom comes. His rule is established in our lives and in this world by His grace.

Now, I have a little timeline on the kingdom of God and I give the biblical basis for this in the book, but it is my chart. Visualize these images on my simple timeline of the kingdom of God. There is the Fall. There is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I cannot represent creation, but this tree in Genesis 3 represents the significant event in our world and life view. I am talking about the human condition and why the human condition is a consequence of the Fall. But in Genesis 3:15 God promises a Redeemer, the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He will crush the one who has sowed evil in this world, who by deceiving Adam and Eve has brought them under his dominion. God promises deliverance. God says to Satan, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and your seed and her seed." God sovereignly establishes His authority with this. Adam and Eve had sided with Satan, but the seed of the woman is not going to side with Satan. God is going to undo that false allegiance and claim His own.

I would like you to visualize the other two important symbols that I use for the timeline. The cross is for the first coming of Christ, His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. And then the downward arrow represents the second coming of Christ. Looking from an overall biblical point of view, so far as the kingdom is concerned, the Old Testament is the era of preparation. The kingdom was there in the theocracy. God did establish His rule in Israel. He mightily delivered them out of Egypt and established His covenant with them. But from the overall biblical point of view, the period of the Fall to the cross is a period of preparation for the coming of the kingdom in its fullness in the Mediator, when He is actually incarnate and comes to live, die, rise again, and then ascend into heaven. So I think that it is fair to say that is the kingdom, in that eschatological sense, for which the Old Testament's prophets prophesy. They are aware that the kingdom is there in a sense in the Old Testament, but they prophesy about the coming Messiah who will establish God's kingdom among all nations. That is inaugurated at the first coming of Christ. This period between the first and second comings of Christ is the period of the extension of God's kingdom, among all nations and with implications for every sphere of life. So it becomes a very important part of our understanding to look at the present stage of the kingdom with Christ seated at God's right hand as the period of the extension of God's rule in our lives and the lives of the church and society, as God gives opportunity according to His will. The kingdom is extended primarily through the gathering from all nations of people whom God has redeemed for Himself. That always has implications as God's people are salt and light in this fallen world. However, it is only with the second coming of Christ that we reach the consummation of the kingdom, in which God finally separates the wheat and the tares and gathers the wheat into his harvest, and we enter the eternal state, the new heavens and the new earth. But the "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" has as its meaning "seek" the reign that Christ has inaugurated, and "his righteousness" alerts us to the principles that are established by God's reign.

Righteousness is the broadest term in the Scriptures for ethical conduct that is pleasing to God. It covers the aspects of justice, mercy, and fidelity. It is all of those in one term, because God is the righteous God. Then righteousness is the most comprehensive term for what we ought to be seeking. And so you see there is now again an overlap. The goal, "Seek the kingdom of God," is something that we are to pursue actively; "Seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness" brings us to the standards of God's kingdom. God establishes His rule among His people by giving to them His covenant with the covenant way of life. And we will unpack that when we come to the section on the Ten Commandments. So still within the goal orientation of our ethic, it takes care of the issue of both what kind of persons we ought to be and what standards we ought to follow. We ought to follow the standards of the kingdom of God, so we go to Scripture to find those standards of righteousness. Of course, the first issue in righteousness is how we can be righteous before God, and we can only be righteous before God through the imputed righteousness of Christ received by faith alone. But that is productive of righteousness in our lives as we submit to God's rule and exhibit the features that He requires of us in His kingdom. So the messianic kingdom comes in stages that are correlative to the work of Christ. The Old Testament was an age of preparation, preparing for Christ, and it comes to a climax with John the Baptist who prepares the way of the Lord directly. It is inaugurated at the first coming of Christ, when He appears at the synagogue and reads from Isaiah 61. He announces that the messianic kingdom has arrived. That is in the synagogue at Capernaum. And through the cross He defeats the powers of darkness. And by His resurrection He achieves the full salvation that God has designed for His people and pours out the Holy Spirit in order that the kingdom may be extended in our day. So we have now a third way of looking at the goal of human life.

So there is the glory of God, the image of Christ, the kingdom of God, and then the fourth way, the fourth summary principle. The fourth thing that we should seek that fulfills human nature and is totally

satisfying is what the Bible calls eternal life. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life.” That is God’s gracious offer of salvation to all. God comes to us in our fallen condition and says, “choose life.” He does not want us to die. Why would you die? Choose life. It is a very interesting passage in Deuteronomy 30:19-20 where Moses is saying, “I set before you the blessing and the curse; choose life that you may live.” And then there is this little phrase, as it is translated by the NIV, “For the Lord is your life.” That is a pregnant phrase, “the Lord is your life.” Eternal life is not something that is just out there separate from the Lord of life. Eternal life consists in knowing and loving God; that is what it is about. And that is why John in his Gospel can say that eternal life begins now. It is a quality. It does go on forever. Eternal life is not simply a quantity of more and more time; eternal life is found in union with Christ. And the key verse there is John 17:3. It says, “Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” So life consists essentially in fellowship with God, or friendship with God.

James 2:23 reminds us, “Abraham believed in the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.” That is another one of those significant phrases. James is alluding to Isaiah 41:8. But as God’s redeemed people, that is our special privilege: friendship with God. Eternal life consists essentially in that friendship; therefore eternal life is incompatible with things that would put us out of fellowship with God. John 17:3 brings that down to a particular focus. Now, I would put it this way. The self that is fulfilled in eternal bliss is the self that hungers and thirsts after God, the self that hungers and thirsts after righteousness. I feel very strongly we should not deny that human fulfillment is the goal. But we do not have a secular view of human fulfillment; we have a biblical view of human fulfillment. Human fulfillment is found in union with Christ, and the person who is fulfilled as a human being is the person who hungers and thirsts after God and who hungers and thirsts after righteousness. So, first of all, in order to seek the goal of human life, something has to happen to us internally to make these things attractive to us so that we will live for the glory of God, the image of Christ, the kingdom of God, and eternal life in the biblical sense. Lots of folks think that “Well, if I go on living forever. . .” They are now talking about genetic manipulation that could add another hundred years to our life, but eternal life is not just going on the way we are. Eternal life is friendship-fellowship with God.

You might ask what the difference is between righteousness and holiness. I think that in a way they are synonyms. Holiness has more to do with the separateness, of being set apart for God. But we are set apart for God in His holiness, the One who is the righteous God. I think that holiness has a more devotional-type aspect, where righteousness has a more activistic-type aspect. But I cannot make an absolute distinction between them. They are used in tandem in Luke: “. . .that we might serve Him in holiness and righteousness all our days.” The major difference seems to be that holiness has to do with our piety toward God, and righteousness has to do with our interaction with our neighbor. I think that that will work in most cases.

So, talking about righteousness, you could ask if taking care of the hungry, feeding the poor, and ministering to the widow and orphan are optional. No, they are not optional. That is righteousness. Those are the things that God delights in on the earth. Jeremiah chapter 9 says, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, the powerful man in his might, the rich man in his riches. If you want to glory in something, glory in this: that you know and understand the Lord who exercises loving kindness and righteousness on the earth, for in these things I delight.” If you delight yourself in the Lord, if the Church delights itself in the Lord, then it delights itself in what the Lord delights in. And those things are the preeminent things that God does delight in, so that our pursuit of righteousness should have the biblical frame of reference for it.

How are we to view human fulfillment on a natural level? In terms of common morality, the common understanding of mankind, there is a sense in which we can help folks to be more humane in terms of the natural life, and that is not something to be dismissed. I am going to give a fuller presentation of the relationship between Christian ethics and what I call common morality later on. But I would say that for folks apart from the Gospel, there are certain principles that lead to better and more fulfilled human lives that ultimately are God's natural law for human beings. So to live according to God's law, even to that extent, is better than not. And we can help folks with that. The counseling programs that are in non-Christian settings do that to have people more integrated and fulfilled in terms of their lives. We do not buy into the secular notion that that is all there is to human fulfillment, but it is better than other ways of living. But we should not confuse that with the fulfillment that comes through the Gospel and the authentic human fulfillment that, because we are created in the image of God, can only be realized if we are renewed in that image after the likeness of Christ.

Let us move on to the next topic, which I am calling "The Disposition of Grace." Let me just say a word about the terminology. In English, the word "disposition" refers to the prevailing aspect of one's nature. Look it up in *Webster's World Dictionary* or any English dictionary. Disposition refers to the prevailing aspect of one's nature. The technical theological term for disposition is *habitus*. And what I am after is the *habitus* that is established by grace. We need a change of heart if we are going to pursue the authentic goal of human life. If we answer the question of what the goal in human life is in a one-word answer, it is God. God is the goal of human life. If we want to expand on that, to use Augustine, it is "to know and to love God." We could use Aquinas, who says "friendship with God," referring to James 2:23. Edwards says, "to reflect God's knowledge, holiness, and happiness." Or our own Shorter Catechism, of course, says, "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

Now, the problem is that nobody seeks that end. Fallen humanity is alienated from its true end and does not seek after God. Sinners do not pursue friendship with God as the goal of their life. In my book, I quote Paul Kurtz who really sort of ridicules the Shorter Catechism, saying, "I think that that kind of goal would be boring." Well, he uses Bertrand Russell and sort of caricatures it, but at least he is honest about it. If you ask him "If you should die tonight, why should God let you into heaven?", Paul Kurtz would answer, "Sounds like hell to me." It is not attractive. There is no affinity with glorifying God and enjoying Him forever if natural man is honest about his conviction. We were the same. We should never forget that. We were children of wrath even as the rest. It is only God's amazing grace that has produced change in our lives whereby we are authentic in the one we actually pursue.

So if the first question of ethics is "what is the goal of human life?" and the answer is God, then the second question ought to be "how can a person become willing at heart to seek God as the goal of his or her life?" How can a person become willing at heart to seek God as his or her goal? If God is the goal, how can I become willing at heart to seek and love God when in my natural condition I do not love God, I do not want God into my life, and I am not a friend of God? I am, in fact, an enemy. How can it happen? In a two-word answer, it is by grace alone that the human heart can be changed in order to pursue God as its goal. Proverbs says, "Out of the heart are the issues of life." And if you look at the scriptural teaching on the heart and at Jesus' teaching on the heart, "Out of the heart of man come all kinds of evil" in our natural condition. So we need to have our hearts changed. We need to be born again in order to see the kingdom of God, in order to enter the kingdom of God. A radical change has to happen. Now, this is the glory of the Gospel, that it produces change from within. It produces a new disposition, a new *habitus*. In the book I quote John Murray, who says, "Behind all overt acts is a dispositional complex of desire, affection, will," and so forth. He has got it right. He is talking about the

*habitus*. He is talking about our basic disposition, which has to be changed if we are to make God our goal.

I want to contrast that with Aristotle. Contemporary ethics is getting a renewed interest in Aristotle. Aristotle's view of human fulfillment goes something like this: "Human nature gives us the capacity for fulfillment, but to develop that capacity requires right habits, and right habits require right choices. Right choices must be repeatedly made and reinforced until they become second nature." The idea is being transformed by the changing of your habits. Really, be improved by the changing of your habits and be fulfilled by the changing of your habits. William Bennett represents that view. This is in the introduction to his book, *The Moral Compass*. "Moral education must involve following rules of good behavior and must involve developing good habits, which come only through repeated practice." Well, there is a point that is to be made there, but there is something more fundamental than that. And we have to be changed from within. I do not buy so soon into this idea of character being formed by habit. It is not particularly Christian; it really is Aristotle, and we need to see how it measures against the biblical way of character formation, which is producing Christ in us. I think we have something different here. You get the idea that somebody has said that the notion of *habitus* is nothing more than an acquired pattern of behavior which results principally from repeated actions of the same kind, like putting so many creases in a starched linen cloth. I think that is a good metaphor. You know, if you do make the right choice often enough, then it becomes second nature. Now, actually Aristotle had kind of a chicken in an egg problem, and he seemed to be aware of it. Really, for a choice to be virtuous, it must arise from a virtuous disposition. But a virtuous disposition is acquired through right choices. So how does it get started? Do you see the problem? If a choice to be virtuous must be produced from a virtuous disposition, and yet you only get a virtuous disposition by making the choices repeatedly until they become habitual, how do the choices become virtuous in the first place? Aristotle never solved that problem; he just sort of recognized it and glossed over it. I think it is fundamental.

How do we get started in terms of virtue? Well, the biblical answer to that is we get started by a work of the Holy Spirit who produces in us what are called the theological virtues. That terminology is adopted because in the classical world there were already four cardinal virtues: justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude. These are worth knowing about, and I will talk about them later, but they all depend upon some world and life view. These are simply categories, and, for example, fortitude is quite different depending on whether you have a stoic world and life view (where there is nothing you can do about anything anyway) or whether you have an idea in which God is in providential control of all things. It makes a very great difference in terms of your attitude toward what fortitude actually means in terms of the system in which it occurs. And so with all the other virtues, these are all necessary in the Christian life, but they depend for their content upon the Christian world and life view. These do not exist apart from some prior commitment to world and life views. But because these formal characteristics were already in existence when the church theologians turned to the development of ethics, they tried to find some vocabulary in order to talk about the *habitus* that is created by the Holy Spirit in regeneration. And what the Holy Spirit creates in us is a disposition of faith, hope, and love. These are called the theological virtues. But these are the *habitus* or the disposition that is implanted in us by grace. And we need to attend more to these three in our ethics. We tend to move very quickly into the Ten Commandments and to the issues that are raised. Now, you will find these virtues in the Westminster Standards on the Ten Commandments. You will find that these are there, but they need to be highlighted as the disposition, or the dispositional complex, out of which all of our ethical living flows. And we have not done enough on this in our circles.

Augustine made a start. As Augustine entered the last decade of his life, there was a certain lay Christian named Lawrence who asked him for a handbook on apologetics. "Not baggage for his bookshelf," he

said. “No, not a book like mine that just sits there.” He wanted something he could carry around so when he was asked apologetics questions he could have a handy reference book to do it. Well, Augustine interprets this as desire for true wisdom that consists in the service of God. The best apologetic is an alternative world and life view, and Augustine was tempted to say to Lawrence, “What you need is faith, hope, and love.” But he thought that maybe that was too short, even for Lawrence, and so he expanded it into a treatise and gave it a Greek title, the *Enchiridion*, which means handbook. And his intention was to expand upon what we now call the theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. Well, Augustine had a tendency to digress, and he got so involved in the exposition of faith that he spent 20 chapters on it. And then I guess he got tired of writing to Lawrence, and maybe this was going to be baggage on Lawrence’s bookshelf, so he devoted only a chapter each to hope and love. But he had the right idea. There is a sense in which everything needs to be developed in terms of faith, hope, and love. This is not an artificial schematism; this really gets to the point of what happens internally when we are born again by the Holy Spirit. There are a number of passages where faith, hope, and love are coordinated in Scripture. It seems to be the underlying framework out of which the apostles write, especially Paul, but also Peter. It is just there, and it comes to the surface from time to time. But what has happened in regeneration is the Holy Spirit has implanted a new disposition, and this new disposition is regularly described in terms of this trio of Gospel virtues, or you could call them graces, because they are the direct work of the Holy Spirit in us.

You know how 1 Corinthians 13 concludes: “Now abide these three: faith, hope, love. The greatest of these is love.” First Thessalonians 1 is another very effective text. In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 Paul is praying for them, “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, those are just what are called genitives in Greek: work of faith, labor of love, endurance of hope. The NIV rightly brings out the force in its translation, “your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, your endurance inspired by hope,” talking about the *habitus* of faith, hope, and love out of which the Christian life flows in work. Faith works. Love works long and hard. It labors. Hope endures under pressure. So you have a new *habitus* of faith, hope, and love that is fundamental to the living of the Christian life. Without disposition, you know that it is an impossibility. Something has to be changed from within in order for us to serve God appropriately.

Let me read a couple of other passages and some that may not be so obvious at first. But there is Romans 5:1-5, which says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” Okay, so faith is the pivot, right? It is by faith that we have access to grace. It is by faith that we are united to Christ, so faith is the pivotal virtue. But Paul goes on to say, “And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Faith engenders hope. “Not only so, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, character hope. Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit he has given us.” You know, it is faith, hope, and love. Faith is the gift of God. It is what unites us to Christ. We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone. It engenders hope, and it works itself out through love.

Let us look at 1 Peter 1:21-22. “Through Christ,” the lamb without blemish, “you believe in God who raised him from the dead and glorified him so that your faith and hope are in God. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth”—that is, in the act of faith and receiving Christ as Savior—“love one another deeply from the heart, for you have been born again by the word of God.” It is faith, hope, and love.

One more text is Hebrews 6:10-12. It says, "God is not unjust, he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." Here is a significant text. The love for God is demonstrated by loving people, and God accepts that, our help for other people, as love for Him. "We want each of you to show the same in diligence to the end in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." It is reverse order, "love, hope, faith," but the same trio of Gospel virtues which become the disposition of the regenerate heart. The Holy Spirit not only works faith, hope, and love in us, but the Holy Spirit, we will see, indwells us and leads us. But the starting point is a radical change of disposition. It does not come about through anything we have done. It comes about through a radical change as the Holy Spirit works in us this new disposition, which essentially consists in terms of faith, engenders hope, and works itself out in love.

You might ask about the order of these three in Colossians 1:5. I am not quite sure what to make of Colossians 1:5. I need to study that some more, but it does seem to have a slightly different order. I will begin at verse 3. Again, it is in Paul's prayer. "We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, that faith and love that springs from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word." So here it looks like hope is the primary virtue, and faith and love spring from hope. I do not say it is different; I think that it alerts us to the need to not be so tight in our distinctions that we cannot observe how hope affects the other virtues. Once you have these three, then they do interact on one another so that hope inspires love and as well strengthens faith. So I think that that is the right approach to that text. But, as Luther so helpfully articulated for us, there is a certain irreversible order of faith in relationship to the other two. Before he came to faith in Christ, he despaired of ever reaching the goal of human life, because in his righteous vindication he was under the threat of the law and of God's retributive justice. He knew he was a sinner and was subject to the wrath of God. No matter how much he confessed his sins or went through the discipline of penance, he could never get any peace of conscience because there was always more. And his confessors thought he was being over scrupulous and felt like saying, "Do not bring us all this stuff." But Luther could not be satisfied until he understood that the righteousness of God is a gift through Jesus Christ that is apprehended by faith alone. The key distinctiveness is Luther's clear apprehension that we can only have peace with God by faith alone, through which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us and we are accepted with God. That is what gives us hope, and that is what inspires our love. Luther said, "As long as we are worried about our salvation, we are using our neighbor as a means to our own end." If the end is secure through faith, we are justified before God, and heaven is ours. Then there is no fear of punishment, we have a secure hope, and we are really free to serve and love our neighbor. Justification by faith alone, when rightly understood, is the thing that moves us to service of Christ because it is not inhibited by the thought of using my neighbor as a means to my end.