

A Great Exchange & Office of Child  
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Session Two

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

Raise your hands if you know the expression, the Great Exchange. It has to do with Christ taking our guilt onto Himself so we can have His innocence and righteousness. An excerpt from Luther:

Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?"<sup>1</sup>

This is a *saving* exchange. Sometimes called the sweet exchange. This is baptismal. Faith stuff.

It is a primary example of how Jesus *reverses* our expectations, but there are many more. He is the Lord who came to serve (John 1:3; Mark 10:45), a tender shoot, a man of sorrow, familiar with suffering. One who seeks the one rather than the 99. Who treats sinners rather than arguing with the prominent or self-righteous.

Family vocation in particular also falls within this pattern. Vocation can be a major perspective reversal!

ANOTHER REVERSAL

Raise your hand if you are a child of God. Now take a moment to think about that. Is that a metaphor or a revelation?

Let's recite a little from the Catechism. ☺

What is the introduction to the Lord's Prayer?  
Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean?

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear fathers.

When we take our perspective from God's Word, rather than our own experiences, there are reversals. Exchanges that take place.

In the catechism, we are taught explicitly that *God* is our true Father. As Christians, *He* is the source of life. Protection. Education. Daily Bread. *His* fatherhood is dominant over our earthly fathers.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's *The Freedom of the Christian* (1520).

Family vocations are not about our own experiences or expectations. Nor about cultural expressions, although those often spring from our vocations and treatments of one another. Family vocations are not all gut reactions or common sense. Family itself is rooted in God and revealed by God's Word.

That is no disrespect to our earthly fathers. It's just a different starting point. A reversal pointed out by Scripture. It's the Word, ringing out through creation, even as it has since the very beginning. It is a profound *honor* that men share in the office of fatherhood that properly belongs to God! It was His first! It is His last! It is always and every shall be *His*.

## PHYSICAL MEANS

God is the true Giver of good gifts. The Giver of Life. The Source and Origin. But how has He chosen to work in our ordinary lives? Through physical means. Through hands and hearts, minds and ministries. God gives us our daily bread, but it pleases Him to do so through farmers, manufacturers, truck drivers, grocery store workers, employers and employees, etc.

Our God lets husbands and wives prepare and serve food for one another, mothers and fathers for little ones, etc.

How does God grant new life? Through sex! Through a union into one flesh! Admittedly different than the baptismal union into Christ and communion with one another!

How does God raise His people? Through Words. And discipline. And parents! Pastors, teachers, grandparents, friends, etc. And ultimately through the very flesh of His Incarnate Son!

God takes what is properly His and gives it to us. We call those gifts, right? But our concept of gifts can be much narrower than His. While we think gift means personal benefit, our Lord gives bigger gifts of exponential love.

Exponential love includes the nearly infinite opportunities within our vocations: to receive as children from our heavenly Father. To love and cherish our spouse. To love and cherish our children. To tend creation, including *stuff* and *our neighbors*. And generally to be fruitful, multiply, and, as King James would say, "replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Gen 1:28).

We *might* include skills and talents as gifts of God, in our ordinary ways of thinking, but HE includes our neighbors themselves. Also our vocations and the offices of marriage, parenthood, and childhood. He includes opportunities for service! Even crosses, which help us to shed ourselves in trust toward God, are gifts with benefits from Him.

Creation is both gift and responsibility.

Our heavenly Father is the true Lord and Master over creation. He is the big L Lord who lets us be little l lords. He is the true Father who shares fatherhood. And this Creator of All, who continues to sustain us in a sense by the breath of His mouth, *uses creation. Stuff.*

He who is not ashamed to use means for grace is not ashamed to use means in the care and governance of creation. Let us not be ashamed of physical means. Let us not get lost in abstractions or speculation.

## NURTURING ESTATE

In the nurturing state, spouses nurture each other. Parents nurture children. Children, too, come to nurture parents.

As church workers, it's interesting to know what *else* is first nurtured there, in the office of child: exploration of creation (aka, play), devotion, education, healthy physicality. Human nourishment includes *all sorts of things!* Including times of rest, taking turns, and bursting into song.

Nourishment can be as broad as Luther's summaries of daily bread.

In the nurturing estate, there are different sorts of pressure. Sure, there's pressure to do well. Gain respect. Be both a person and an asset. But it's nestled into security and camaraderie. There's time for growth and learning how to practice. There is an unconditional foundation which lends itself to building up, tearing down, and building up even stronger than before.

Family, then, is sort of the opposite of business. It isn't about pitting successes against failures, or products, dividends and keeping track of costs (although family budgets exist and are generally necessary). Family is all gift! Commonality. Unity. When we work, we can work together toward common goals: food & drink, house and home, field and cattle, etc. We share what we have. It's beautiful.

We do not feed babies because they deserve it. We nurture them because they are a gift from God. Also, as we'll get into it later, because they are one flesh with their parents, an extension of the human family, and one for whom Christ our Lord and Savior has died!

The Office of Child, or more specifically the offices of son and daughter, also clearly has perks! Like unconditional love! Daily bread! Safety! Play! Education!

## JESUS AS CHILD

It is likely that most of us use the expression "heavenly Father" *heavily* because of how much comfort and instruction it gives us. Thanks be to God, there is also comfort and instruction in God's only *Son*.

Who can tell me: who is the very first child? Jesus!

Does an eternal Son of God inherently alter human perspectives of childhood? YES! Did the Eternal Son also fully enter into the human office of child? Yes!

Jesus Christ was no less God when He was an infant. He was no less perfect when He took faltering toddler steps. He held the vocation of *human child* and as such, how does Luke 2 put it? "The child *grew* and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40).

*That* is what Christians also want for children. Our own and others: that they may grow, become strong, and be filled with wisdom. Note: children may be passive but they are to be *given* wisdom. Wisdom does not come from within, whether or not child-led learning is widespread. We are to build one another up (1 Thess. 5:11), not pull ourselves up by our bootstraps!

Adults share God's gifts with children, in daily bread, education, and the church. So that children grow within the gifts God has already given them. In talents and abilities, wisdom and discernment, faith and salvation. Again, growing *within the gifts* God has already given.

As children of God, we also learn what our heavenly Father wants for each of us! He wants us to receive our daily bread, learn and discern. Grow and be filled with Wisdom—which is Christ! He wants us to use our strengths in service to others, and He wants to use our weaknesses as a reminder of His provision, His active role in taking care of us—often through others.

God’s favor is upon us, even as we hear in the Benediction on a regular basis. The Lord is blessing and keeping us. His grace and His face *do* shine upon us. The Lord lifts up His countenance upon us and gives us peace! As members of His household, gathered in the church, citizens in His kingdom.

Now. What title did Jesus use to describe Himself the most? The Son of Man. Interesting!

Let’s be clear. Probing the mysteries of the Trinity is beyond our topic at hand. But we don’t have to do that to realize that Jesus is a son, and son is one in the office of child.

Here’s a stanza to consider about the Child of all Children: “For He is our childhood’s pattern, Day by day like us He grew; He was little, weak, and helpless, Tears and smiles like us He knew; And He feels for all our sadness, And He shares in all our gladness” (Once in Royal David’s City, LSB 376:3).

As Lutherans, we get to tell the Anglicans behind this text: Jesus did have help! A courageous couple. Dedicated to God and to one another. Whom we can emulate!

There are *great* confessions about childhood in hymns. “Join hands, disciples of the faith, Whate’er your race may be; who service my Father as His child Is surely kin to me” (653:4). These hymns are empowered by a better understanding and perspective on the office of child.

## OFFICE OF CHILD

The office of child illustrates some things that will be very helpful to us today: vocations and offices often reflect a greater reality that belongs to God. Marriage reflects Christ and the Church. Parenthood reflects God’s fatherhood, and childhood reflects Christ, both as divine and Incarnate.

Being a child is about many more things than age or development. In fact, I think it, as an office, is especially clear that vocation is about more than what we do. It is about who we are, and how we are connected to others. It is an office and a status.

Status does not mean stagnant. We can grow in strengths and abilities. Our opportunities and situations may change. Sometimes we need to repent, go back and gird up our loins to address weaknesses we’d thought we’d strengthened!

But one characteristic of the Word is that, when taught in its entirety, God calls us wherever we are, in whatever stage we’re going through, no matter what our talents or abilities may be.

Is it shameful for an infant that he cannot work the land? No. Is it shameful for an infant to cry before he speaks? No. While babies can be selfish, too, their crying out belongs to communication and *growth*. Not growth into earning a gift, but growth within gifts God has already given.

Children are called to *grow*. To learn. To be brought to Jesus.

God *explicitly* calls babes in arms to come to Him. To be blessed. To receive His gifts. And to be in *Scripture*, the *church*, baptism, etc. Then, later, many are *sent*.

## DEPENDENCE

Raise your hand if you're dependent! Not a word well cherished in our independent days! But we are all dependent! On God. The sun and the rain. Also typically each other.

Children, particularly *young* children, are called to be dependent upon others. They are to *be helped*. The relationship of dependence is where we see the faith and trust of a child.

At the same time, children do not always trust just anyone. God forbid that they would! We must explicitly teach them *not to!* This is a time of drugged induced abandon, despair, and sexual predators.

The distinction: a child should look for good *from the person God calls to give him good*. That is good! Right! Proper! Honorable!

How does Luther define a God in the Large Catechism? "A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the [whole] heart." This pertains to vocation, because God works through human means. Children are to look to their parents. Spouses are to look to their spouses. All children of God are to look to our heavenly Father.

Such practical advise is explicitly seated in Scripture and the catechism. Look to those whom God has given you.

Kids should look to their parents. That doesn't mean that their parents are great, and we are certainly free to supplement parenting with as much love and support as we can. For body and soul, mind and heart.

Martin Luther speaks powerfully about honor in the Large Catechism under honoring your parents. Raise your hand if you think this is one of the funniest parts of the Large Catechism!

108] We must, therefore, impress it upon the young that they should regard their parents as in God's stead, and remember that however lowly, poor, frail, and queer they may be, nevertheless they are father and mother given them by God. They are not to be deprived of their honor because of their conduct or their failings. Therefore we are not to regard their persons, how they may be, but the will of God who has thus created and ordained. In other respects we are, indeed, all alike in the eyes of God; but among us there must necessarily be such inequality and ordered difference, and therefore God commands it to be observed, that you obey me as your father, and that I have the supremacy.

Other terms we could use? Strange. Odd. Ill-prepared. Immature.

## CYCLES & LEARNING

The Office of Child is a double-blessing both in that we are both children and able to look with favor on children and childhood.

Children *model* for us both the life of faith and the life of sin. As we watch children stumble, we can better recognize our own stumbles. With a major caveat: practice does *not* make perfect. At any age. Why in the world do we pretend it does? Or that superficial appearances, including success, count more than actual development? But we learn.

The Christian life is a cycle of life, death, and resurrection. We fall. God speaks and grants us repentance by His Holy Spirit. He forgives and renews us by His Word. Then, frankly? Repeat ad nauseum.

Children show us this all the time: sin, sorry, up and repeat. Sin, sorry, up and repeat. And we get frustrated with them! How much more frustrating *we are*, the children of God before our perfect Father!

Children are to learn that this explicit cycle belongs to all Christians. They will sin their whole lives, even though we as Christians also *practice* avoiding temptations. Christians will *practice* confessing their sins and turning to God again and again. Christians will learn just how central God's Word is, even as it seems to slip away from us time and again.

Children. Need to learn that we do not outgrow forgiveness. Or learning. Or God. Or gathering together.

Failing to distinguish sin fails to practice forgiveness and Gospel proclamation as often as possible.

And that Law and Gospel experience, at *almost every age*, turns us back to the larger truth that life is not about me, my worries, needs, desires, or problems.

Here's an excerpt from a historic collect for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity:

“Let Your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please You . . .”

All of us continue to learn to pray and receive God's gifts where God has placed us. What a blessing that we can say that to young children, too! All of us struggle with selfishness, authorities, and overshooting our marks. We do . . . what we didn't mean to do! And children benefit from learning that!

We benefit from watching children, and children benefit from realizing that we adults are children, too!

## HONOR

In a fun turn of events, children actually have one of the highest responsibilities. It is the Office of Child which is the realm for cultivating *honor* in addition to love.

You see, honor isn't actually a prerequisite to bearing a child. Right? Parents don't deserve children. They don't work and earn them. Children are gifts. But Luther gives an excellent treatment of honor under the Fourth Commandment in the Large Catechism. (Have I mentioned that middle schoolers can read and digest the Large Catechism?)

Here's an expert (emphasis mine):

To this estate of fatherhood and motherhood God has given the special distinction above all estates that are beneath it that He not simply commands us to love our parents, but to honor them. For with respect to brothers, sisters, and our neighbors in general He commands nothing higher than that we love them, so that He separates and distinguishes father and mother above all other persons upon earth, **and places them at His side.** 106] For it is a far higher thing to honor than to love one, inasmuch as it comprehends not only love, but also modesty, humility, and deference as to **a majesty there hidden,** 107] and requires not only that they be addressed kindly and with reverence, but, most of all, that **both in heart and with the body** we so act as to show that we esteem them very highly, and that, next to God, we regard them as the very highest. For one whom we are to honor from the heart we must truly regard as high and great.

This is a big deal. But looking at this from the perspective of the office of child, we also see what a tremendous gift this is to children and frankly the world! Children are to cultivate inward and external honor for others!

Luther goes so far as to say:

how great, good, and holy a work is here assigned children, which is, alas! utterly neglected and disregarded, and no one perceives that God has commanded it, or that it is a holy, divine Word and doctrine. For if it had been regarded as such, every one could have inferred that they must be holy men who live according to these words. Thus there would have been no need of inventing monasticism nor spiritual orders, but every child would have abided by this commandment, and could have directed his conscience to God and said: "If I am to do good and holy works, I know of none better than to render all honor and obedience to my parents, because God has Himself commanded it. (112)

When parents belittle children, children are hampered in their growth, education, and their ability to honor. Parents are *great*, with a *tremendously high office*, but they can hamstring entire societies.

The world exists with hierarchy. One can either learn how to trust and serve others, God-willing with the result of upright laws, fair justice, and humane treatment of others. Or one can learn how to fail or corrupt the systems.

These are parenting issues. Yet the office of child can transcend the human weaknesses of parents and *still learn, grow, discern*, and honor!

But only if God's Word is given sway. Honor *is not natural* to sinners. Respect? *Not automatic* in sinners. Yet children often do have elements of obedience and trust that lend themselves to their roles of childhood, growth, and learning. Even unbelieving children!

By the grace of God, kids just pick some things up! Thanks be to God!

It is the Christ Child who saved us. In His humble life and death and glorious resurrection. By His obedience and submission. By taking lowly, frail, odd little things and *honoring them anyway*. He grew into gifts already His own. And He shares them with us.

Let's list *significant themes throughout Scripture* related to being a child:

- Heir & inheritance!
- Family inclusion.
- Birthright? Sounds a little odd to our ears, maybe, but John 1:11-13
- Adoption!
- Baptism
- Crying out, Abba!
- Quiverful

Let's parse it out:

Office of Child

Neighbor served: Parent  
Unique role: Child & inheritor  
Duties: Reception, Obedience, and Practice (Cycle of repentance)  
Proper works: Growth & Education  
Perks: Safety! Daily bread! Play!  
Temptations: Disobedience, dishonor, peer pressure  
Crosses: Fallen parents/fallen authorities, weakness & inexperience  
Status: Heir! Lord to be!

## ONE-FLESH

If one were to ask, what is a child, what could we say?

- An immature human
- A blessing from God

A child is an embodied soul, perhaps in early stages of development. Who is also a direct physical result of a one-flesh union.

The one-flesh union is a bit mysterious. How do two people come together as one and then make a third? Would we have come up with this system?! But it happens! *In the flesh!* On a regular basis! And our Lord Himself refers to it in terms of essentially a new & united life.

Not every one-flesh union results in a child. And sadly people enter into one-flesh unions only to tear it apart after the night together or a few months. Or through a divorce.

But I want you to see that the current cultural family crisis is bigger than sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, and divorce. Even Christians fail to recognize God's terms for ourselves. Let alone for others and their implications.

One-flesh is a *big deal* and children are a *blessing!*

Yet despite the very physicality that links us to parents, whether biological or adoptive, it is super easy for us to isolate ourselves from our parents. When we are one-flesh! (Note: One-flesh unions are not only reserved for sexual activity! Families are one flesh. The church is one flesh.)

This, in part, is why James says, "if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."<sup>2</sup>

There are cultural crises for the family. Right now there are also family crises in the church. "If anyone does not provide for his relatives . . . he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"!

On the other hand, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27).

## LETTING CHILDREN BE CHILDREN

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<sup>2</sup> "If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows" (1 Timothy 5:16).

- Corban: (Mark 7:9-13)



So what can we do? Letting children be children appears to understandable in drastically different ways! *Yes, treat children according to their age & level of understanding.* No, let's not leave them there in their immaturity! (As for all the rest of us, we can't be left to our own devices either!)

We are *not* called to sin. We just do it anyway. But watch and you'll see every baptized child, no matter the age, engage in this cycle: Believe. Sin. Repent. Be forgiven. Repeat.

This demonstrates a role of the liturgy in Christian life. The liturgy leads our confession as it speaks with Scripture, convicting us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Mother church effectively lends us language so that we can admit what we've done, seek the Lord where He may be found, receive His saving gifts, and go forth in faith, praise, and thanksgiving.

I'm not sure I'd ever seen it listed this way before, but the LCMS Life Library online, in its vocation section, lists articles in the following in alphabetical order:

- Called by the Gospel
- Called to be Citizens
- Called to Our Work
- God at Work
- Masks of God
- Vocation: Fruit of the Liturgy
- Your Family Vocations

Click on the header and it takes you to articles. "Vocation: Fruit of the Liturgy" is a great little piece by Dr. John Pless, reprinted from *Logia*. He quotes the introduction to *Lutheran Worship*:

Where we are told: "Our Lord gives us his body to eat and his blood to drink. Finally his blessing moves us into our calling, where his gifts have their fruition."

God's gifts, God's service to us, is distinct from the work of man. Yet how greatly His work impacts us and ours!

In church, we focus on the gift of the forgiveness of sins. Yes, we also pray, praise, and give thanks. But, as Luther writes in his catechetical hymn, "Here is the Tenfold Sure Command," stanza 4: "And put aside the work you do, So God may work in you. Have mercy, Lord!"

There is time for God's Work in us and there is time for our work with our families and the world. But *God comes first*. Evening and then morning. Seed before growth. Sabbath before the work week. Life before action.

We already said that baptism has certain duties, such as live life by God's Word. But as, and after, we receive God's gifts, we do not hoard them, but share them.

First we must be restored. Forgiven. Cleansed. Then we go out again. Only *this centrality of the Word* begins and sustains a Christian cycle. Only *this ongoing reception of the means of grace* culminates the Christian's cycle in this fallen life. Until we are restored permanently at either death or the resurrection of the dead.

One of the best things my father ever told me was this, and I was little at the time: church is where God gathers His children. Church was the place *for me*. I was raised through the liturgy. When I sinned, I could use words I'd learned to confess. When I was forgiven, I could burst into song if I wanted to.

Church is for God's children of every age. Because of the Christian cycle and because of the forgiveness and restoration given through the Church for thousands of years. Thanks be to God!

It is ok to be a child. To have room to grow. *God lets us be His children*, with room to grow *and be forgiven*. That has direct implications for us as we deal with others of every age.

## VULNERABLE & DEPENDENT

Dependency is essential to Christianity. Because we are children of God. Even infants!

Infant children are vulnerable and dependent. And thus children help to inspire love. Their vulnerability cries out for it. *Simply by being children, they can help activate our own parenting and caregiving impulses.*

Plus, infant needs and weaknesses provide relatively clear paths toward helping them. Hold. Feed. Change. Be patient. It's pretty straight forward, even if children remain on a timetable all their own.

A child's dependence also helps young parents remember that good things come from *outside* ourselves. Daily bread and God comes from *outside* ourselves, though sounds and substances.

The next generation also tends to move parents to pity and remember their own parents. It's cyclical.

Elderly parents *become* vulnerable and dependent. This too, when you're face to face with it, can inspire love and mercy. You get to return some of the gifts yours parents first gave you: personalized attention, cleanliness, nutrition, etc.

But what do we do as more and more reject children entirely? Speak of children as burdens or punishments?

When generations are kept apart, can all the needs still be met?

## COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

We may sometimes think in terms of community assistance. Yet many are missing out on some of the most basic community assistance there is: benefits inherent to face-to-face community! Community is held together by a network of God-given vocations. That network has its own perks!

Learning to get along with neighbors is a beneficial skill that is rarely cultivated now. But is there anything quite like it? Taking the time to get to know someone, outside our age group, outside our familiarity, can teach us so much!

Even time within the family offers community benefits. Elderly dependent parents help civilize us! Watching our mouths around young kids helps civilize us! Etc.

Our treatment of family defines humane practice. Are people disposable? Or only bound together for as long as we benefit or desire it? Is sex a big deal or not? Are relationships outgrown or grown into? Humanity may try to distance itself from family, but the two simply cannot be parted.

If you've moved away from your folks, which frankly every one of us probably has, we can try to make sure they're still plugged in. They're with people who will help them as needed, love & accept them, etc. Assistance doesn't *all* have to be family, and, speaking of, how can we as the church help, with the various children we've now talked about:

- The young
- The newly converted
- The transitioning
- The caregivers
- Those adult children without children to help them
- Those mourning family losses

So how can the church help?

- Keep in mind that the Great Commission also applies to children, not that they are all missionaries, but all are to be taught to know *and cherish* ALL that Christ has given to us.
- If you don't like children, try to help anyway. Getting to know individual children is how you learn to like children. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 18:10)
- Be open to children. Don't let young families get dirty looks because a boy—surprise surprise—doesn't know how to sit still in a place he hardly ever comes to!
  - In fact, train your elders in what to do to help young families and how to respond to those who complain about them.
- Do background checks on everyone. If it's standard procedure, it isn't singling anyone out.
- If your congregation or school wants more outreach into the community, consider volunteer tutoring. Community cooking or quilting classes. Music classes are huge right now and Lutherans have stellar musicians to look up to!
- It kills me that you can't hardly visit nursing homes right now. But maybe you can have pen pal and call lists.
- Encourage family time *at all stages*. "Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God" (1 Timothy 5:3-4).

Did you hear that? Children and grandchildren are to *learn* to show *godliness* through their interactions in their own household and make some return to their parents!

## ABUSE

It is not an exaggeration to say that Satan attacks childhood in His rebellion against the Son of God.

Idolatry sacrifices children. Love of money neglects children. Too many material goods distract from actual human interaction *in every generation*. Selfishness prevents us from getting to know our neighbor, which is how we learn to recognize him and his need.

No one is called to harm a child. No one is given authority in order to serve their own desires rather than their neighbors.

God does not give gifts to be abused. Parents who abuse their children are not acting as parents. They are sinning against their children, their vocation, and God.

An additional pastoral concern is this: abuse doesn't actually stop. It is an unrepentant sin centered on control. It is a slavery which further enslaves others.

I get that lines can fluctuate and that people may have different boundaries for what is acceptable in their family. I'm not one who thinks spanking is wrong. But I know an LCMS pastor who left strangulation marks on his son's neck, while the son was on break from seminary.

So here's what you do. Figure out what boundaries are signs that *you personally* need help. Tell them to your spouse. If you think you'd *never* need help, that's not necessarily an encouraging sign. We are all called to set a guard over our mouths (Psalm 141:3). How much more should we beware violence and the lies of our hearts?

Next, figure out what warning signs you would take seriously if you saw them. Teachers know to watch out for bruising and certain behavior. But teachers also know they cannot strike a child, cuss, call derogatory names, etc. They have *professional* boundaries that help protect them from relying on *personal* ones.

Pastors tend to be less supervised. And a pastor's child could approach a circuit visitor. A DP. It makes sense that a child tries to follow a parent's chain of command. As church workers, you may become aware of abuse through surprising channels. So go ahead and think some of these things through.

Let's parse abuse as an anti-vocation!

#### Abusers

Neighbor served: Self

Unique role: The honored one, often due to expectations about authority

"Duties": Control & maintain appearances

Proper works: Manipulation

Perks: Respect & obedience

Status: god

Although we are all sinners, we are not all abusers. Here is an important distinction you can look for: abusers imprison rather than keep, in the Hebrew sense. They separate rather than connect. Control and manipulate rather than trust God and others.

If abusers were not good at keeping up appearances, they would not be able to establish themselves as abusers. If abusers did lack authority, they would not be able to establish themselves so firmly.

Mental health issues may be involved. Who, especially among Christians, can really expect control? Yet abusers do. As though obedience and pleasing others should be constant, matter-of-fact.

Abuse is a twisting of good. It is the turning of a legitimate vocation into self-service. A twisting of faith into manipulation of what can be seen.

Recognizing the good of an office does not mean abuse can be overlooked. Abuse is a slavery to sin in need of law and likely legal restraint. As neighbors, we can work toward safety for others. As neighbors, we can recognize that sinners can sin against one another. As Christians, we should admit that sin does not stop on its own. Sin continues to the point of rape, murder, and total abject enslavement if left unchecked.

We can talk about it, but it seems to me that those who are abused can, in faithful love, remove themselves and thereby prevent further sins of abuse. Is it easy? No. Abusers have no compunction against fighting back. Unless they know they are in the wrong and therefore strive to keep it private.

If you are helping someone who has been abused, aim for safety as much as possible. Do it prayerfully. Take time to prepare.

The synod has free materials available for those who have suffered domestic or sexual abuse. Stuff for adults and stuff for kids. Google LCMS Social Issues. You may be pleasantly surprised to see what's been developed in the last ten years.