



Issues, Etc.TM
Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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"Christian Vocation, Part 1: Bishops, Pastors, & the Laity"

Guest:

Pastor Peter Bender

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WILKEN: We'd say it's official now, even though the church year started – well, more than four weeks ago in Advent. Now in the Christmas season, when everyone feels like a new year is beginning, everyone's looking at that anticipated New Year only less than a week away, they're saying, "What is my life going to look like?" Even Christians kind of fall into the trap of the New Year's resolution. I will tell you right now: none of it is necessary. You may make a resolution;

there's nothing wrong with that. But to sit there and reevaluate your life in terms of last year and this year and say, "How can I improve on this or improve on that?" Anyone can do that. A Christian has a sure and solid guide for life in the Word of God. And where God's Word speaks, then the Christian is duty-bound, and where God's Word doesn't speak, then the Christian is free. It all goes into the doctrine of vocation: your calling

and callings in life. We're going to begin a series on vocation.

Greetings, and welcome to *Issues, Etc.* on this Tuesday afternoon. It's December the 27th. A happy and merry Christmas season to everybody. We're beginning a five-part series on Christian vocation. Today we're going to start with the one that people usually think of when they think of a "calling," and that is of bishops, pastors, and then those who hear them: laypeople.

Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. He's pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Sussex, Wisconsin, and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy. Peter, welcome back to *Issues, Etc.*

BENDER: Merry Christmas, Todd. This is the time when our Christmas celebrations should really gear up in earnest, these days after Christmas.

WILKEN: Now, with regard to the doctrine of vocation, let's talk about that in general before we get into pastors and bishops and preachers and those who hear them. You say that this doctrine is really about how it is to live by faith rather than by human merits, but we're going to be talking a lot about what people do. How is it by faith rather than works?

BENDER: Well, I think it's really important to underscore a distinction for us as Christians when we talk about vocation, that most people aren't going to make – certainly the unbeliever is not going to make it, and even Christians can kind of get confused. We simply sometimes lump every office and work that we do under the category of vocation – like I'm a father, I'm a husband, or a woman is a wife and a mother, and under that kind of overarching umbrella, believers and unbelievers alike have the same station. But when we speak of vocation as Christians, we're especially focusing on our calling. After all, vocation comes from this Latin word, *vocatio*. And it's the call of the Gospel, to live by faith in Christ and to live by faith in His grace and

mercy, which fundamentally changes the way in which we live in our various stations as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and so forth. And so we should think about our vocation as Christians in terms of Galatians 2:20, where St. Paul says, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." And so that the life of good works in one's station and calling is that faith in Christ's grace that is active in love toward the neighbor, whoever that neighbor might happen to be. And the works that are born of this faith in the grace of God are never done for our own benefit. I do not live in my vocation for my benefit; I live for the benefit of my neighbor – whoever that happens to be. And so faith is active in love, in the various fruits of faith that come forth in a Christian's vocation.

WILKEN: Why is it important to make a distinction, even in the Christian, the regenerate man, that we are at the same time the old Adam and the new Adam, when we talk about the life of faith that is lived in vocation?

BENDER: I think it's important to make a distinction because the old Adam, who is fundamentally an unbeliever, is motivated by works, by merit, when he loves. In other words, the man loves his wife because she pleases him. And that's fundamentally a works-righteous kind of faith. The new man, however, born of the Gospel of God's love in Christ that is freely given to us for Jesus' sake, loves in a radically different way. We love not because the person we love is worthy of it, but just as Christ loves us freely and sacrifices Himself for us and dies for our sins – though we do not at all deserve it – and freely forgives us as a gift of His grace, that shapes the way in which the new man of faith then lives in the same kind of love toward his neighbor. And so the Christian husband would love the wife, not simply because she's beautiful and pretty and pleases him, but he sees in her an opportunity to have compassion and mercy and to shower forgiveness upon her

because that's what Christ has done for him.

WILKEN: What is the role of the Ten Commandments when it comes to the Christian living that life of faith in vocation?

BENDER: Well, the Ten Commandments is a summary of God's Law. The first table, speaking of love for God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the second table, love for the neighbor as oneself, is always going to – as a summary of God's Law, the Ten Commandments are always going to accuse us of sin. They're going to expose the lovelessness of our hearts and lives. The ways in which we turn inward and do not trust in God and call upon him in every trouble, and the way we live for ourselves with respect to our neighbor, rather than for our neighbor's benefit. So, as such, the Ten Commandments are a useful tool in calling us to repentance for our sin, that we might flee to Christ for His mercy and grace and out of which, then, the new life of faith and works of love for the neighbor is born.

WILKEN: This is something that I think people first introduced to the notion of Christian vocation often get wrong, and then they get the rest of vocation completely wrong, and it becomes as burdensome as principles for Christian living that they could get any place else where someone is basically talking about Christianity of self improvement. And that is that vocation is intended to be the realm of freedom and of love, and it is intended to be a life that is lived in repentance and the forgiveness of sins. In other words, the Christian vocation isn't only Law. Talk about that.

BENDER: Yeah – in Luther's *Small Catechism*, he's got all these passages from the New Testament listed. We'll, I'm sure, have an opportunity to kind of read through some of those over the course of the five sessions. From one standpoint, there are always admonishments and exhortations, and they can be thought of as, really, a rather fierce proclamation of the Law. But

from another standpoint, those Table of Duties passages that are cited by Luther from the New Testament are really descriptions of what Christ is, as the faithful bishop and pastor and preacher. And they describe and define what, for the pastor, the life of faith in Christ looks like in the ministry of his own office. And so when we look at the Table of Duties, it's sort of like where, in Christian vocation, where Law and Gospel come together. On the one hand, the Law is always going to be accusing us, always going to be exposing the self-centeredness and lovelessness of our old Adam. But we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. And we, as Christians, are called to delight in the way in which Christ is that faithful bishop and pastor and preacher for us, living the life that is above reproach, and freely forgiving us and holding so firmly to the trustworthy message of His heavenly Father that He faithfully preaches and teaches us, not for His own benefit but for our benefit. So we see in the Table of Duties a concrete description of how love is fulfilled and how that love is fulfilled in Christ and what He does for us. And so as Christians, Christian vocation we should place under the Third Article of the Creed – that we're called by the Gospel of God's free grace and love in Christ. And so when we look at the Table of Duties, we should see how Christ is being described there, in all of those passages. We live by faith in Him, and we assent to this – this is good, and this is right because He has been that bishop and pastor and preacher for me, and He has done all of this for me. And then that shapes receiving Him, then shapes the way in which I live in the freedom of His forgiveness in love toward others.

WILKEN: Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. We're beginning on this Tuesday afternoon, December the 27th, a five-part series on Christian vocation, beginning with – and we will talk about this on the other side of the break – what most people think when they think about a Christian calling. They think about a pastor, someone called to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, to

serve God's people in the Church. Well, that's not the only vocation, but it is the one we'll begin with. We'll talk about it in terms of bishops, pastors, and preachers. Not three different offices, but one office with three different duties, if you will. And of course, in the course of our conversation, we'll also talk about the duty that Christians have to hear their pastors, their preachers, and their bishops.

I'm Todd Wilken. We'll be right back.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. We're beginning a five-part series on Christian vocation today: Bishops, Pastors, Preachers, and Lay People.

I'm Todd Wilken and Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. We're basing this series on Christian vocation on a book by Pastor Bender called *Lutheran Catechesis*. Peter, if you would, in about a minute, tell us a little bit about this volume.

BENDER: *Lutheran Catechesis: Catechist Edition* has lots of helps for the pastor and Christian parent in teaching Luther's *Small Catechism*, and a section – rather extensive – on these Table of Duties: bishops, pastors, preachers, parents, husbands, wives, and so forth, along with prayers that correspond with it. So it's the aim of our Concordia Catechetical Academy to provide such resources for Lutheran pastors and Lutheran parents in the teaching of their children and in the teaching of adults as well.

WILKEN: Folks, you can find out about *Lutheran Catechesis* at our website, issuesetc.org. Click "Listen on Demand."

One other question on vocation before we go on to talk about the vocation of pastor, I think, is the general way to speak about this. One of the things that our listeners often find so freeing about vocation is that it sets a boundary. Instead of this kind of "I'm called by God to love everyone on the

planet." In some tangible way, it sets a boundary on who the neighbor is.

BENDER: Sure.

WILKEN: And even for pastors and bishops, he's not called to be pastor to every Christian on the planet, but to those to whom God has called him. Talk about the freedom of having that boundary upon "who is the neighbor within my vocation."

BENDER: Sure. I'd also like to say that we can only do what God has given us to do. And the rest we've got to commend to Him. As pastors, we especially need to hear that, too. I'm called to this particular flock here in Sussex, Wisconsin. I'm called to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments to these people, and as such also to bear witness to the Gospel of Christ in the greater community of Sussex here. That's my calling. And I'm going to have to commend other congregations to God and to the pastors whom He has given them. And I'm also going to have to commend the results of what God has called me to do here, to Him. In other words, all I can do is preach and teach the Gospel as God gives me strength, and it's up to the Holy Spirit to work faith when and where He pleases among those who hear the Gospel. And that's a very freeing and liberating thing. We can only do what God has given us to do according to our station and calling. And then we commend the rest to Him and have a good night's sleep.

WILKEN: So where would you begin Scripturally to talk about the vocation of bishop, pastor, and preacher?

BENDER: Well, what's interesting is there are so many passages in the New Testament that talk about the office of the ministry and talk about the work of the ministry. Matthew 28, the so-called Great Commission – to make disciples of all nations. Luke 24, about the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. What Jesus says at His ascension in Acts Chapter 1 about bearing

witness to Him in Jerusalem, Judea, and so forth. In Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, in the Table of Duties under "To Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers" – and I think the titles that he gives are very significant – he doesn't make use of those passages. But instead, he cites 1 Timothy 3:2-6 and Titus 1:9, passages that are part of the pastoral epistles, Paul's letters to Pastor Timothy and Pastor Titus. And those passages serve a number of purposes. One, they instruct the Church concerning the kinds of men that she should call and ordain to the office of bishop, pastor, and preacher – which is not three different offices, but really the one office of the Word and Sacraments. And by doing that, he indicates to the Church that ministers need to be men who hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught and handed down to them, and men whose lives are not scandalously immoral, so that they do not dishonor the Gospel of Christ. And so in 1 Timothy 3:2, it begins, "The overseer must be above reproach. That doesn't mean he has no sin; there's no such thing as a man who doesn't. But before the world, he must lead a godly life of faith in Christ and love and service to the neighbor. It goes on to describe some very practical things about the kind of life he is called to have. "The husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, and able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money." And what's interesting about that list of things that St. Paul cites there is the opposite of those things: to be given to drunkenness, and to be quarrelsome, and not to be hospitable, or to lack self control. Those are all things that would be characteristic of the self-centered flesh – the old Adam, the life of unbelief. So one of the things that Paul is doing in that list that he gives to the Church concerning the kinds of men that should be called into the office of the ministry is that he's directing the Church to say, "These men ought to be men of faith in the Gospel who have received the Gospel of Christ, and that Word of the Gospel has so born fruit in their lives that it is manifest in self-control and an attitude of hospitableness

and not being quarrelsome." Because they're called to be of service to others in love and not in service to themselves.

WILKEN: Is there some connection there between how Paul describes the bishop, pastor, preacher, and how he describes the Christian in general in terms of the fruit of the Spirit?

BENDER: I think it's important that we not confuse forgiveness and whether or not one is a Christian, and whether or not one can occupy an office or remain in office in the Church. For example, that a man may have significant challenges under this list of things in 1 Timothy 3, and therefore the Church would conclude, "We're not going to place such a man into the office." They do so not because such a person has too much sin that he can't be forgiven, as if – if he were forgiven, then he could be in the office of the ministry. Rather, the issue is one of what is going – how is the Church, in love, going to serve the world and serve the congregations committed to those pastors? And the Church is going to do this by placing men into the office that do not distract and detract from the very Gospel of Christ that they are called to proclaim. "And so the overseer must be above reproach, temperate, self-controlled, respectable," and so forth, and he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message. And this is recognized when he is that, as the work of the Gospel and the Spirit of God in him, as opposed to any virtue that he can congratulate himself for.

WILKEN: Let's talk a bit about the way it's broken down by Luther in the Table of Duties, just briefly. And you said before that these are not three different offices, but three aspects of one office – bishops, pastors, and preachers. What's the "bishoply" aspect of this one office?

BENDER: Some translations have "bishop" as "overseer," and that would be a good definition. What does he oversee? Well, it's not the business manager kind of oversight, Todd, it's the oversight of doctrine: what is

being preached and taught in the Church? Is it faithful to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to the mandates of Christ? He is the overseer of the Sacraments: how are they administered? Are they administered according to Christ's institution? The word "pastor" is a long-standing term. It means "shepherd," and he shepherds the flock by teaching faithfully the Gospel, by teaching faithfully the Word of God, admonishing the erring, calling to repentance and so forth. And the final term there, "preacher," gets at the very essence of how he is bishop and pastor. He is a proclaimer of the Word of God, preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and the purpose of his preaching and teaching is always to serve the cause of faith in Christ. And when he does these tasks as Christ has mandated, then he commends the work that he's done on Christ's behalf to God, to use it as He sees fit for the creation of faith and for the strengthening and sustaining of that faith.

WILKEN: With only about a minute before we take our last break, it seems to me that since he lists "husband of one wife" as one of the qualifications, this would, like fatherhood, for instance, be a vocation limited by God in His call to men. About a minute for your comment on that.

BENDER: Yeah, that's implicit in the pastoral epistles in passages such as this, that it's not simply "the spouse of one spouse" or something like that, but "husband of one wife." And that, I think, echoes the idea that the pastor is in the stead of Christ, and that as the Church is the bride of Christ, so the congregation has very feminine characteristics in the sense of receiving the love of the bridegroom Christ, which the pastor administers. So I don't think it should be at all gender-neutralized in these translations, but allow the apostolic scriptures to stand "husband of one wife" because only men are to be ordained into the office of the ministry.

WILKEN: Pastor Peter Bender is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the

Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. On this Tuesday afternoon, December the 27th, we're starting off our five-part series on Christian vocation, talking about bishops, pastors, preachers, and lay people. Stay tuned.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Pastor Peter Bender is our guest, starting a five-part series on Christian vocation today: Bishops, Pastors, Preachers, and Lay People.

One of the things that I think probably can be of concern to both pastors and lay people is this term "above reproach." Does it mean that for all intents and purposes, the pastor should have no discernible flaws, mistakes, sins, or otherwise unpalatable personality characteristics?

BENDER: There's no pastor that's ever going to be able to live the kind of life that's going to please everybody, and evidence no character failings or flaws or sin. There's simply – the only sinless man was our Lord, and even He didn't please everybody. But his life can't give a scandal to the Gospel. And when there are flaws in the preacher, or when he errs or makes mistakes, the characteristic of a life that's above reproach is that he admits his mistakes. He confesses his sin. And I think it's really important – and these passages allude to it, that one of the temptations that the sinful flesh has within pastors is to consider attacks upon their ministry and the preaching of the Word as personal attacks upon themselves, which they have to defend and lash out against in a quarrelsome way, and so forth. And the Scriptures are clear on this. The pastors are going to be opposed for the sound, trustworthy message of the Gospel that they preach. And it's not about them. If they oppose us as preachers, they're really opposing Christ. The battle that we wage is not for our own person, it is for the integrity of the Gospel. I think that manifests itself in

the kind of description, then, that Paul has in these passages in the pastoral epistles.

WILKEN: At the same time, a pastor might consider someone who is a parishioner, who is responding not to his preaching or his faithfulness, but maybe to his abrasive personality or irritability, or something like that.

BENDER: Sure.

WILKEN: He might mistake that for an attack on God's Word when it isn't. Talk about that.

BENDER: Yeah. If he's being a jerk, he ought to say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong." And the kind of maturity that Paul is outlining in these passages is the maturity of someone who is governed by the Gospel, which always means – I love John Kleinig's book, *Grace Upon Grace*. It's always the understanding that we're all beggars before God, even the most faithful pastor who does a good job at preaching, he's still the sinner who is in desperate need of God's grace and forgiveness constantly in his life. And the mark of maturity is not to live as if I have no sin, but when there are failings and shortcomings and sin, to confess it and to confess it not only to God, but to confess it to our parishioners if we have been short-tempered with someone and to beg their forgiveness in the Lord.

WILKEN: Why does Paul stress "not a recent convert"?

BENDER: Again, going back to John Kleinig's lovely book, *Grace Upon Grace*, he speaks about Christian maturity as being not needing less and less of the mercy and forgiveness of our Lord Jesus, but rather the longer we live, the more we realize how spiritually impoverished we are in ourselves, and how utterly dependent we are upon God. And I think that's why Paul pinpoints that he can't be a recent convert, because the temptation there is always to think of one's spiritual condition as, in some respect, a product of their own spiritual strength. And

the longer we live as Christians, a mark of Christian maturity is the more we learn to believe how dependent upon the grace of God we are.

WILKEN: So, one more question on the pastor-bishop-preacher. And you have emphasized this in our conversation so far. Paul's words: "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message that has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." This is a constant refrain with Paul. He says to Timothy, "Watch yourself and your doctrine, for thereby you will save both yourself and your hearers." What is Paul doing, emphasizing something that, nowadays, a lot of Christians say just is – should be on the back burner. Doctrine? Some people even say doctrine divides.

BENDER: Doctrine is life. Doctrine is the teaching of the Word of God. The content of all doctrine in the Church is Christ. So to hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught is to hold firmly to Christ, because we know of no Jesus except that Jesus that comes to us through the apostolic and prophetic Scriptures, the apostolic doctrine of the New Testament. That's a lovely passage, that Titus 1:9. After going through this litany about the kind of life that the pastor is called to, it then centers in upon the foundation of his ministry, which is the trustworthy message of God's Word, which has Christ as its content. And as Jesus lived entirely from the Father's Word, and we can say by faith in what the Father gave Him to preach and to do and to say, only then was He able to live faithfully in love toward us as our Savior, doing the work that God had given Him to do. So the Christian pastor, ministering his office in Christ's stead, lives by faith in the Word of Christ, that trustworthy message, holds onto it. Nothing is more important than that, because to lose that is to lose Jesus. Only then will he be turned outside of himself, outside of self-centered love, to selfless love. Only by holding firmly to Christ will he be turned inside out in service to his flock and to his hearers, to give them what

they really need, even though it might cost him in some respect, as it cost Jesus. So this Christian vocation for the bishops, pastors, and preachers is first and foremost about believing that what Jesus did in His ministry for us as our Bishop, our Pastor, our Preacher, is the source of our life, and learning to believe in that, then makes it possible by the grace of God for us as pastors to have Him bring forth that fruit in us as well.

WILKEN: What are the primary Bible passages that come to bear in the life of faith, in the vocation of those who hear pastors – the lay people, if you will?

BENDER: Sure. I think when we talk about the disciples of Jesus, we'd run again to the Matthew 28 passage, "Make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." And that would be an excellent place to start, in every way that Jesus says, "Follow me, follow me." But those are always calls to faith. As Luther says elsewhere in his explanation under the Holy Spirit, the Third Article, "I can't by my own reason or strength believe, but Jesus has called me by the Gospel – called me by His Word of forgiveness, to faith in Him." That faith in Him, then, is manifest in, more than anything else, wanting to hear him. That's why this particular section of the Table of Duties in the *Small Catechism* is titled "What the Hearers Owe Their Pastors." The passages that Luther cites there, 1 Corinthians 9:14, "The Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel." Galatians 6:6-7, "Anyone who receives instruction in the Word must share all good things with his instructor." What's interesting is that both passages that he cites immediately are talking not simply about laymen, but their relationship as hearers of the Word to their pastors, who are called to preach them the Word. So there's this emphasis upon the fact that we, as disciples of Jesus, as followers of Jesus, as laymen, need to hear the external Word of the Gospel preached and taught from

outside of ourselves. That's how faith lives. Faith comes by hearing. "How shall they hear without a preacher?" Romans chapter 10. And these passages, those two that I mentioned, and also 1 Timothy 5:17-18, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor." It starts off by talking about pastors and the double honor that they are to receive from their hearers, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. "And we ask you, brothers," under 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, "to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other." So these passages of the New Testament that Luther cites in the Table of Duties continue to emphasize the yoking of pastors and parishioners together as givers and receivers of the Word of God, from which they enjoy their life together.

WILKEN: We'll take a break. When we come back, another ten minutes in this part 1 of a five-part series on Christian vocation. Today, talking about bishops, pastors, preachers, and as we're talking about right now, those who hear God's Word: the lay people.

It's Tuesday afternoon, December the 27th. Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. He's pastor at Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin.

Now, there's a passage that Pastor Bender didn't get to yet. And it's one that may cause us to kind of get up on our hind legs in this "reject all authority" age in which we live, where, in Hebrews, the writer says, "Obey your leaders. Obey them and their authority." We need to understand that rightly, and we will on the other side of the break.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Pastor Peter Bender is our guest.

What is this obedience that Paul says hearers owe their pastors?

BENDER: Yes, the passage that you're referring to is the last one in the list of the Table of Duties, Hebrews 13:17. "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority." And here, the context of it is not talking about leaders in general or civil leaders, but most especially the leaders of the Church, the bishops, pastors, and preachers. Submit to their authority, which is the authority of the Word of God. And the reason given is they keep watch over you as men who must give an account. And they are accountable to Christ, who has called them and placed them into the office of the ministry, the office of His Word and Sacraments, and they are to be faithful to Him. And it's because of that that this passage says "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority." It's the obedience of faith, and the writer to the Hebrews uses obedience quite a lot in his letter to speak about faith. Assent to the Gospel, receiving the forgiveness, believing it, which has its corresponding fruit then, in love and service to the neighbor. Elsewhere in the Table of Duties, or in this particular section, the earlier passages, it speaks about the admonishment to the Christians to provide a living for their pastors who preach to them. And that's certainly prevalent in a lot of those passages from 1 Timothy and Galatians that I previously cited. But really, what's behind that, and also what's behind this Hebrews 13:17 passage is that the way in which parishioners, or lay people, honor their pastors best is when they're eager to hear the trustworthy message that their pastors preach. And that's what gives the pastors the greatest joy. And when they're receiving that Word, a Word that is faithful to the Lord and what He has given them to preach and administer, God Himself will bring forth the fruits of faith and the obedience of faith in the hearts and lives of those who receive it. So that last sentence of the Hebrews 13 passage says, "Obey

them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden." And it's a great joy for pastors when parishioners say "Amen" to the Word of God that is preached to them.

WILKEN: One of the – it might be a fad; I certainly hope that it is – one of the fads that I've noticed in the church in about the last decade is that congregations, when someone joins, may require the new member to sign a covenant. It's an agreement of some kind. Often stipulated in this covenant is an obedience to the pastor, or more generally, to the leadership of the congregation, in matters that do not have anything to do with the Word of God.

BENDER: Right.

WILKEN: The general direction of the congregation, or "We're going to have this kind of program or that kind of program," but they're explicitly asked to agree to submit to the pastoral leadership in those things that are not specified in God's Word. What's your response to that?

BENDER: That places the parishioners in the congregation under the Law, not the Gospel. The kind of obedience that is spoken of here in Hebrews is the obedience of faith in the Word of God. When there are indifferent matters of church business and administration, this always ought to be governed by love. Never by coercion or the force of the Law, but always governed by love, and especially giving consideration to the minority or to the tender heart. I've always said that in congregations, if we're going to a voters' meeting of the congregation and there's a big issue, or we're going to have a building program or a remodeling project or something, and there is a great deal of tenseness in the congregation, and some temptation to bitterness or rancor over this that faith, active in love, would dictate, "Let us set aside this decision until we can discuss it further and come to a greater consensus." Our congregations may be governed, strictly speaking, according to constitution and bylaws by majority vote. But we should

really err, if you want to use that word, on the side of allowing consensus and love to prevail. And if there's going to be a contentious issue, then we ought to set aside that issue and talk about it some more until cooler heads and a calmer decision can be arrived at, out of love and concern for everybody.

WILKEN: You pointed out earlier that there's kind of a parallel between husband and wife, these paired vocations.

BENDER: That's right.

WILKEN: And pastor and those who hear them, another paired vocation. Talk about them, in the last few minutes that we have.

BENDER: Yeah.

WILKEN: How would you summarize the relationship shown us in God's Word between pastors and their hearers, hearers and their pastor?

BENDER: Yeah. As a pastor, I'm called to be a pastor, not to serve myself, not to make myself rich – either in a temporal, monetary sense, or to build a name and a reputation for myself or to receive the adulation and praise of others. I'm called to give myself fully to the work of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments to my hearers. And their relationship to me is not one that is fundamentally about telling me how great I am, but to receive from me what Christ has called me to give to them. And if I don't get a Christmas card from my parishioners, that's okay. If I don't get a thank you card from my parishioners, that's okay. But if my parishioners come faithfully to the Divine Service, if they attend my Sunday morning catechesis and Bible classes, if they say "Amen," if they make use of confession for the sake of hearing Christ's absolution, and then God brings forth in them, through the Word and Sacraments that they have received, love for their spouses, for their children, for their fellow Christians in the congregation. That's what I want. And that's

their relationship to me, is to receive the Word that Christ has given me to give to them, that they might live in love in their several callings in life.

WILKEN: Peter – with about 20 seconds – tomorrow we're going to continue our series on Christian vocation, talking with you about civil government and citizens. With 20 seconds, what's in store for tomorrow?

BENDER: Well, I think we need to distinguish between the right hand and the left hand kingdom, or the spiritual and the secular kingdoms, as Luther sometimes does. Under civil government and citizens, we'll have an opportunity to talk about how God rules in the civil realm, but also the Christian's relationship to the civil realm. And we can see that especially in how Jesus related to the civil realm. We say in the Apostles' Creed that He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, who was the Roman governor in the civil realm. And His deference and His obedience as a citizen under the civil realm and under Pontius Pilate does a lot to teach us about what our relationship is as Christians to the civil realm.

WILKEN: Pastor Peter Bender is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. Talk with you again tomorrow, Peter. Thanks.

BENDER: Great, Todd. Thanks a lot.

WILKEN: Pastors are a gift to God's people, and God's people are a gift to pastors. And together they comprise Christ's body, the Church. All are students of God's Word. All are under God's Word. The only authority that passes between the two is that of God's Word. What is the relationship? It is a relationship of love and forgiveness, of selfless service – really only fulfilled in Christ Himself. Which is why Christ remains the head of His Church, the true Pastor under which all pastors are merely under-shepherds. Christ's Word prevails. That is a Word of Law against our

sin and His beautiful death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins. It's a beautiful thing, and all of it a gift from Christ Himself.

I'm Todd Wilken. Talk with you again tomorrow. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

