

One must constantly be changing, while teaching The Changeless Message.

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Corinthians 9:22)

A thesis for the Master of Practical Theology Program
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In the area of education / young adult

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Part of the Masters of Practical Theology Program at WLS is that “the candidate for this degree will submit a master’s thesis based on this final extensive project. The thesis will reflect the study the candidate did in connection with this project as well as documenting and evaluating what was done in carrying out the project” (See the WLS website for more information.)

My project for this aspect of the MPT program was to “create a doctrine course that could be used to teach teenagers in a high school setting.” Since I serve in an area Lutheran high school, the course will be designed for that particular setting (as opposed to a prep school that might have different applications, or as opposed to a youth group meeting, etc.). Since every area Lutheran high school has things that make its religion curriculum unique, this course will be designed specifically for Lakeside Lutheran High School.

Along the way, I have learned one major lesson that could serve as my thesis based on that project. That thesis could be summed up this way: It is necessary for the religion teacher to be constantly rethinking, changing, and adjusting his methodologies of teaching God’s Word as he seeks to help each student grow in faith and in the knowledge of God’s grace.

In other words, I, as a teacher, would like each student to grow deeper in their appreciation for “how long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (Eph. 3:18). That doctrine of God’s grace, which flows through all the other doctrines of the Bible, doesn’t change. A student will only grow as he or she spends time in the Word of God – reading it, pondering and reflecting on it, discussing it, applying it, sharing it, etc. The teacher is always experimenting with various ways of getting a student to do those sorts of “Word-activities” in a high school setting. Some methods will work well with certain students, while others will not. A method that works well one semester may not work well with students in the next semester. This is where the teacher is challenged to be constantly rethinking and changing methodologies.

When I originally began this project in December of 2005, I thought to myself, “When I am done, I will submit this as a project for the MPT course.” It is now June of 2008, and I’ve come to the conclusion that a teacher is never “done.” A teacher can never say, “I have established my content and methodologies that I will now use for the next ten years. Here they are!” The idea of always changing and modifying methodologies makes it impossible for the teacher to be “done.”

The purpose of this project is to discuss the thesis: “One must constantly be changing while teaching the changeless message.” That thesis will come up again and again as I follow this outline...

- I. The history of the project – goals and objectives
- II. A look at other doctrine courses
- III. The challenges and blessings I’ve discovered while teaching doctrine in a high school setting
 - A. What worked, what didn’t work, and why
 - B. Learning about high school students, and myself as a teacher
- IV. The most recent course

- A. Its strengths and weaknesses
- B. How it could be reworked and adapted for future courses

V. Concluding thoughts: relating this course to the overall theme or “thesis” -

I. The history of the project – goals and objectives

In March of 2005, I accepted the call to be an instructor of religion at Lakeside Lutheran High School. One of my duties was to teach a doctrine class to students in the 11th grade. I was assured that there was already a course in place. A “binder” existed that contained all the teacher materials and student materials that I would need to teach that course.

Trying to adapt an old course

During the summer before that school year, I reviewed the materials. The course had been taught by one teacher for many, many years. The textbook “A Summary of Christian Doctrine” by Edward Koehler seemed to be the basis of the course. From what I could gather, the course consisted of lectures followed by quizzes, reading assignments and worksheets, some practical applications, and tests.

I liked how the class was planned out – the doctrine class began with the “Natural Knowledge of the Law” and ended very logically with “Eschatology.” I liked how the students were held accountable to listen to the teacher and to read the materials.

I ran into some problems as I tried to adapt these materials for myself. The course handouts were not available to me on any sort of a computer file – everything was on paper. The style of type suggested that many of these handouts had been created by a typewriter many years ago. As a result, I would have to re-type every page of the notes, if I were to change them in any way.

The content of the handouts also presented a challenge. It wasn’t always clear to me what the former teacher had been teaching the students. His lecture notes consisted of two or three paragraphs, which summarized what he had talked about with his students for 45 minutes. What did he talk about? What were the main points? Applications? The quizzes and tests sometimes solved those sorts of mysteries, but other times created more mysteries, as I didn’t always understand what was being asked on those quizzes, or why.

The textbook, “A Summary of Christian Doctrine,” also presented some challenges. As I began reading through chapters of that book, I found parts of it to be “heavier” in content than what I would have liked. If my mind was wandering while reading it, what would be happening in the mind of an eleventh grader? While the goal of this doctrine class was to “dig deeper” into some of these doctrines of the Bible, I wasn’t sure if assigning readings from “Christian Doctrine” would get the students deeper into the Word, or if it would bore them and discourage them. The style of writing was very dry. It read almost like a dictionary or encyclopedia. I really wanted the students to focus more on various doctrines of the Bible while reading the Bible itself.

It became clear to me that I wouldn't be able to just pick up "the binder" and simply use the materials that had been presented in the past. My challenge was to teach a doctrine class while creating my own materials.

At first, I was frustrated and a little angry by this whole situation. I'm sure my sinful nature played a part in those feelings. Negative thoughts about the former teacher flowed through my mind from time to time: "What's the matter with him? Why was he not able to pass down a nicely organized, easily adaptable, logical and applicable doctrine course that I could simply open to page one and start teaching?" Looking back, I now understand that I was actually experiencing the results of my thesis: "*One must constantly be changing while teaching the changeless message.*" The former teacher, who had been teaching these same doctrines for years had very likely been doing a fine job. It was obvious that his content – the basic doctrines of Christianity – had not changed over the years. But his methodologies probably had been changing. This is why his "lecture notes" were so brief – it allowed him flexibility to modify what he had said and how he had said it from year to year. This explains his sometimes-hard-to-understand tests and quizzes. "You had to be there" was the underlying message of many of those documents. He didn't update or change his handouts into a computer file because he probably figured that he didn't need to – he could use the old handouts and change them or update them in class while he taught.

The Christlight Doctrine Course

Since time was short – just a week before the semester would begin – I needed to find a resource for teaching doctrine to 11th graders. I was informed the Christlight had a doctrine class that was a component of its high school curriculum. It seemed like a perfect fit for my situation. Although the Christlight doctrine course was not intended to last an entire semester, it seemed to be adaptable enough to use during that first semester.

I ran into some issues with the Christlight course as I used it during that first semester. Some of those issues were a result of my own inexperience as a teacher in a high school setting. I was very "green" in my classroom management techniques, in my expectations of my students (sometimes too high and sometimes too low), in my preparation, in my presentations, etc. We had our share of "rough days" in doctrine class that first semester, and I am very much to blame for those days.

It did seem to me, however, that the Christlight doctrine course had some issues that contributed to the challenges I faced. The two basic issues to me seemed to be depth (too easy) and logic (why is it set up this way?).

There were moments when the doctrine course had depth. But much of it, especially the discussion questions, seemed to lack that. Perhaps the challenge is that many of the students at Lakeside already have a very deep Bible background, and have already studied many doctrines in great deal through confirmation class. The Christlight course may have been aiming for the "middle road" – not too shallow, but also not too deep (since there are a number of high school settings where the students don't have a great deal of Bible background).

Logically, I didn't always follow the Christlight course. Some of the proof passages chosen for certain doctrines seemed odd to me. I wasn't sure why one doctrine would follow another. I also wondered why some doctrines were missing from the course (creation, resurrection, etc). I'm sure that part of the explanation is that this course was intended to be presented in the context of the other Christlight courses. The doctrines of the creation, the resurrection, and others would be taught in other courses at other times. Perhaps part of the reason this course existed was to fill in some "doctrinal gaps" – cover topics that the other Christlight courses might not explicitly cover – which is why it was presented in a certain way. Perhaps the proof passages that would have most logically supported a certain doctrine were already presented in a different course, which is why lesser known passages were raised up as proof passages for certain doctrines of the Bible.

I believe that the writers of the Christlight doctrine course had my thesis in mind (subconsciously) when they wrote the course: "*One must Constantly be Changing While Teaching The Changeless Message.*" They expected that the instructor would modify, add, subtract, and supplement the content of their course, based on the instructor's setting. Once again, I was experiencing my thesis without realizing it. I was frustrated that the Christlight course wasn't the kind of course in which I could just open to page one and start teaching. I was still learning that every course needed to be approached with the understanding that it likely could not be taught "as is."

At the end of teaching this course for a semester, it became clear to me that I needed to develop some of my own materials for the following semester. I didn't have much time to develop something, since I only had a week of Christmas vacation to create a doctrine course from scratch. I decided to use materials from a number of different resources, and combine them into one doctrine course for 11th graders.

The course as a project – goals and objectives

Since I was in the Masters of Practical Theology program during this time, I thought this might serve as a good project for the course. "How do I teach doctrine to 11th graders who already know a great deal of doctrine?" seemed to be a challenging mystery to focus on as a major project for a summer quarter course.

During the short time I had to prepare a doctrine course for semester 2 of the 2005-6 school year, I had one goal in mind – to create a setting where students would be in direct contact with the Word of God as they studied the main doctrines of the Bible, and therefore grow in their faith. My objectives were to...

- 1) Go more in-depth with some of the key doctrines of the Bible
- 2) Be more visually oriented, using powerpoint to create pictures that illustrate each doctrine
- 3) Find questions and applications that help make each doctrine more "real" to the high school student

As I write this paper, it is June of 2008, two and a half years after starting this project. My basic goal has remained the same. But my objectives have changed, somewhat. I'll write more about this later, but in summary I would say that my emphasis on # 2 has lessened. My energy has become more and more devoted to finding better questions and applications (#3). Once again, the idea of changing, while teaching the changeless message of the Gospel, comes through even as the goals and objectives at the beginning of this project were stated.

II. Examining other doctrine courses and resources

From the start, I've been looking at other doctrinal courses to see what could be helpful to me as I prepared a doctrine course for high school students. I used a few as I spent a week preparing for my first semester with a new course. Since that first semester, I've experimented with other resources. I'll be giving a short synopsis of each of the different resources, along with how I attempted to use them, and my assessment of them. Along the way, I've come to the conclusion that you can learn something valuable from just about every resource. However, not every resource is useful in a high school setting. Some resources that are packaged as very useful are surprisingly "un-useful."

- 1) A Summary of Christian Doctrine by Edward W.A. Koehler. CPH, St. Louis: 1939.

I found this resource to be valuable as it helped me understand a basic framework for teaching doctrine. It makes the most sense (to me, anyway) to start with the natural knowledge of God, move to the revealed knowledge of God, and then use the Apostle's Creed as the outline for teaching various doctrines of the Bible. The "Table of Contents" in "A Summary" was especially helpful this way. This book also was helpful as it set forth many of the basic points to remember for each doctrine. I also appreciated its approach to all of the many false doctrines, and "leaned" in that same direction as I taught my course: "With the exception of a few instances, he (Koehler) has not attempted to disprove erroneous teachings, but has rather in a positive way set forth what the Scriptures teach" (A Summary, Foreward, Page iii).

However, it didn't seem to me to be The Textbook for teaching 16 year olds. The Foreward seemed to indicate that this book was intended for college students, and those who are teaching Bible lessons to other students. The writing style didn't seem (to me, anyway) to be able to hold the attention of the average teenager. Requiring an occasional reading from the book seemed to me to be appropriate. Requiring the student to read from other sources on doctrinal topics, and from the Bible itself, seemed to be a better approach.

- 2) Christlight Doctrine Course. NPH, Milwaukee: 2005.

This resource was helpful for highlighting certain doctrines and Bible passages that would be appropriate for high school students. There was something to learn from each of its 14 lessons. I particularly liked the lesson on eschatology, along with its discussion questions that bring up some of the false doctrines that are common in our culture. The lesson on church fellowship was a difficult one to teach as it was set up in the book. I

used that lesson to get ideas for questions and applications, but found that more background needed to be established before tackling some of the discussion questions. Generally, I didn't find this course as helpful as I would have liked. It seemed to be lacking in a few areas, as mentioned earlier in this paper.

- 3) Myth or Faith? A Fresh Look at Christian Doctrine by Donald Deffner. CPH, St. Louis: 1995.

I found this course to be helpful in a number of different ways. It approached each doctrine by presenting a common religious misconception, such as "at death, Christians become angels." It then proceeds to use the Word to present the truth and "debunk" the myth. I used this course's approach as my basic framework for my "first attempt" at teaching a new doctrine course.

- 4) Pastor Doug Tomhave's powerpoint catechism course. (Available on CD at request. I received it in 2005.)

This course helped me to see what a doctrine course using powerpoint could look like. He used many illustrations, and had many good questions for discussion for his catechism students. I used some of his ideas for illustrating doctrines, but I tried to come up with my own original ideas.

- 5) Luther's Catechism produced by Pastor Michael Schultz and sold through the "Point of Power" website. I downloaded it in 2005.

This course helped me to see another angle at teaching doctrine while using powerpoint resources. His illustrations were excellent, and more advanced than anything I would be able to create during that short period of time. I learned a great deal from his course, but didn't borrow much of it. A great deal of the content was geared more toward grade school students preparing for confirmation, and not so much for high school students going through these doctrines a second time.

Using these three courses, I created my own handouts for the new doctrine class. It seemed to me that handouts were necessary, since a teacher is constantly "competing" with other courses to hold the attention of the student. If the student doesn't have a piece of paper from your course sitting on his desk, that student will find another course's set of notes to study during the religion class. I also thought that the handouts would serve as a good visual aid to what we were talking about. If a student was required to not only listen, but also to write down the main points of what he was hearing, that student would have a better chance of remembering things. These were some of the reasons why I wanted handouts for the students. More thoughts on "class handouts" are included later in this paper.

I also created powerpoint slides that corresponded to the handouts. This was very time-consuming, but served the purpose of making the Word of God as visual as possible for the students. I also required each student to make his or her own powerpoint illustration of a doctrine of the Bible. This combined the idea of participation with the idea of making the Word of God more visual.

I will discuss how things went that first semester later in the paper, under part 3: “Challenges and Blessings – what I’ve learned along the way.”

After the school year was complete, I began preparing for the next “round” of doctrine classes. My plan that summer was to spend time reworking and improving the course. My plans did not go as well as I had hoped. During the previous school year, I had accepted the call to serve as Assistant Principal for Student Life. Much of my summer was spent preparing for the new duties involved in that position. I really only had one week to tweak / rework / improve the course that I had taught the previous semester. I investigated and used a couple of resources to add to / improve my course...

- 6) 19 Minutes with Luther by Pastor Tim Gumm. NPH: Milwaukee, 2002.
Pastor Gumm’s course provided some new applications and discussion questions that seemed usable in a high school setting. I was limited by time and wasn’t able to incorporate a great deal of his course into mine. Given more time, I believe that this resource would be valuable, as it presents the doctrines of the Bible at a more adult level. The “down-side” is that some of his applications are geared toward adults who are further along in life (people with mortgages, children, careers, etc.) and less at adults who are in a transitional time in their lives (teenagers).
- 7) Prepared to Answer and More Prepared to Answer by Pastor Mark Paustian. NPH: Milwaukee, 2004. Parts from these books served well as reading assignments for the students. It was easy to match a chapter of the book with a doctrine of the Bible that we were studying. The students were able to read parts of the article, answer questions on a worksheet, and observe a good way of talking about faith to an unbeliever. At the same time, the student could learn more about a certain doctrine of the Bible from the article they were reading. I liked how it addressed a common misconception or negative view about Christianity, and then used logic, apologetics, and ultimately (and most importantly) the Bible, to set forth the truth and to direct a person to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The students expressed appreciation for these reading assignments.
- 8) Faith Under Fire. A video series produced by Lee Strobel as the moderator. Zondervan: Grand Rapids: 2006. The packaging of these four DVD’s (each an hour long) makes them sound like a “slam dunk” for catching the interest of doctrine students. Each DVD has four debates that take place between a believer and an unbeliever about a certain point of doctrine. For example, a Christian debates with a Muslim about Jesus – is he the Son of God or not? I ran into a number of problems with this resource, however. The way it was presented attempted to be “too cool” or “too cutting edge.” The high school students could see through that quickly, and expressed their feelings through facial expressions and “scoffing sounds” during the videos. The content was disappointing too. Many of the Christian “experts” who debated with the unbelievers were too deep and philosophical. It was hard to track their lines of logic, at times. Some of the Christian experts spent all of their time and energy using logical arguments to “prove” their points (like “proving” that heaven is a real place, etc.), rather than just clearly stating the Word of God. It didn’t serve as a model for Christians who are preparing to share or defend their faith.

This resource now sits in my desk drawer, but perhaps it could still be used as a teaching tool. One suggestion made to me was to offer parts of this video to the students for their comment. Let them tell me what they thought was good about the video, and what they thought was “not so good.” Let them come to their own conclusion that the Word of God needs to be more prevalent, that “too much logic and not enough Word” isn’t a good approach to witnessing, defending, etc. Rather than me, as the teacher, concluding those things and storing the video in my desk, I can look for ways to teach valuable lessons by allowing the students to evaluate a resource like this. I plan to explore ways of using this resource, and other resources like this, in a positive way with the students.

- 9) Discovering the Bible. A DVD. Gateway Films / Vision Video. Worcester, PA: 1996. This DVD acquaints students with the Bible. I thought this would be helpful as we approached the idea of the inerrancy of the Bible. Once again, however, this resource didn’t work out as well as I would have liked. The host, once again, tried too hard to be “cool” about the Bible, something the teenagers don’t put up with for very long. The content is very basic, almost intended more for the person who is just being introduced to the Bible for the first time. There might be a 10-15 minute segment that would be helpful as it illustrates the number of manuscripts of the Bible, and the widespread nature of those manuscripts, as compared to other literature of that time. But the hassle of using this video, and finding the right spot on the DVD to show that 10 minute clip, has resulted in this video also being stored in my desk drawer.
- 10) The Privileged Planet. This DVD is produced by Illustra Media and based on the book The Privileged Planet by Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards. Regnery Publishing, Inc: 2004. This DVD does well in helping the student to see the complexity of nature and the universe in which we live. I used this video while teaching the doctrine of creation. It very clearly shows that the idea of this world and universe developing by chance is an unreasonable assumption to make. Showing 20 minutes (out of 60) of this video is enough to make that point, without causing the student to lose interest.
- 11) Prophecies of the Passion. This DVD was produced by La Mirada Films in 2005. It was very helpful in reviewing with the student the basic events of the passion of Jesus Christ. It connects every step of the passion with an Old Testament prophecy. The unique aspect of this video is the artwork it uses to show the passion of Jesus as it connects the Old Testament with the New. I’ve used this video every semester since August of 2006 and have always received good comments by students about this video. It fits well while discussing the work of Jesus Christ in the Second Article of the Apostle’s Creed. It also works well as an end-of-semester activity, when the students are getting burned out and need something that lets them learn more passively.

Adding these six resources to the other five, I proceeded to teach “round 2” and “round 3” of the doctrine class for the next school year. Things went better than the previous year. However, there were clearly some issues I needed to work on as I finished out the school year. The biggest challenge as a teacher that school year was the time factor. It was my first year as an assistant principal in a high school, and most of my time was spent carrying out my new duties. There

was very little time to prepare good lessons day after day. There were days when I wasn't even able to teach class, because a discipline situation had suddenly come up. This made it very clear to me how important it was to prepare well for this class over the summer. More thoughts on structuring daily preparation time are included later in this paper. As far as how things went that school year, a more detailed summary of that will also follow later in this paper.

I was able to spend a little more time during the summer preparing for "round 4" and "round 5" of teaching doctrine to eleventh graders. A resource that I spent a great deal of time looking at was the website, www.bluefishtv.com. This website featured video clips that a religion teacher could use to supplement his lessons. I was very excited about this website and downloaded numerous video clips (each one is only \$1.99). The website was very easy to navigate, and the preview feature worked very quickly and very smoothly. Another website that featured video clips was www.pointofpower.com. These video clips were also well-done, but the preview feature was awkward, and often times didn't work well for me. The cost, \$10 per clip, also discouraged me a bit. In the end, with limited time and resources, I used the "bluefish" website and prepared my course with the idea that I would use numerous video clips to supplement my lessons. My plans fell apart quickly once the school year began, when I learned that the religion teacher of sophomores had already thoroughly mined that resource, and had shown all the good clips to his students during the sophomore year. Lessons were learned by me that way as well, and I'll talk more about those later.

A few other resources I looked at as I prepared for the next school year was...

- 12) The 24/7 Experience – A DVD Curriculum for Following Jesus Every Day. This DVD was produced by the ELCA and distributed through Zondervan Publishing, copyright 2006. This DVD looks good for using with high school students, but didn't really strike me as something useful once I reviewed it. It portrays a number of teenagers traveling around the country to see Christians living their faith in real life. It was good to see what people were doing as Christians. But the connection to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins was shaky. It sometimes felt like the video was saying, "All that study of God's Word is not important. Leave that behind, and start DOING SOMETHING to show your faith (give food to the homeless, teach illiterate people to read, etc.). Then you will actually grow in your faith." I didn't like that "vibe" I detected. It also seemed to me that the video was trying too hard to show how Christians can be "cool." This video sits in my desk drawer. Once again, I wonder to myself if I should show a clip or two to the students, and let them come to their own conclusions that "something is missing" from the video they were watching.
- 13) Our Christian Symbols by Frederick Rest. Pilgrim Press, Cleveland: 1982. I liked this little book that explained many of the Christian symbols that you will see in various church sanctuaries. I had planned to incorporate the concept of "symbols" into each doctrinal lesson, since many of the doctrines of the Bible are illustrated by symbols in our various churches. Because of time constraints and my own disorganization, I wasn't able to use this valuable resource as much as I would have liked. "Symbols in each lesson" is probably too lofty of a goal. Perhaps having a "symbol lesson" come up two or three

times per semester would be more realistic. I hope to use this resource more in the future.

- 14) The People's Bible Teachings series by NPH. This resource has proven to be very helpful in teaching doctrine. I asked the class to read certain key chapters from some of these books, as we covered certain doctrines of the Bible. Some of the books were more helpful, and some less, depending on the style of the writer. It seemed to me that some of the authors were writing for a more advanced audience (almost seminary level), and some of the writers simplified things and added more illustrations and anecdotes, making the text more palatable for high school students. Some of the authors addressed tricky discussion questions, which I found useful as a resource for teaching my class. I felt very comfortable referring students to this series of books when they were researching a doctrinal topic (what does the Bible say), as opposed to just allowing them to look on the internet, to see what the Bible says about a certain topic.
- 15) Don't Check Your Brains at the Door by Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler. Zondervan: 1992. I enjoyed this book, which touts itself as "For High Schoolers," as a resource to use from time to time. It takes a similar approach as the "Myth or Faith" course by CPH and "Prepared to Answer" series – it introduces a common misconception or myth about a certain doctrine of the Bible. It then takes the myth apart, using apologetics and logic. It concludes with a "workout" where the reader is asked to look up Bible passages that set forth the truth of what the Bible says about a certain topic. I liked this approach and used it from time to time. As time allows, I'd like to use this resource more extensively.
- 16) The Case for Christ. DVD version, by Lee Strobel. Produced by La Mirada Films in 2007. I plan to use this video in the future as it gives some good apologetic arguments for the reliability of the Bible, for the uniqueness of Jesus (you can't believe he's just a good teacher), and for the resurrection. The weakness of this video is that Mr. Strobel is always out to "prove" the work of salvation by Jesus Christ, when in reality one will only believe it by being exposed to the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, it's helpful as a class resource and discussion tool.
- 17) The Case for a Creator. DVD version by Lee Strobel. Produced by Illustra Media, copyright 2006. This video is related to The Privileged Planet DVD mentioned earlier. Mr. Strobel looks at different aspects of creation (astronomy, biology, chemistry, etc.) and argues that these scientific findings don't lend themselves well to the idea of everything happening by chance. I don't plan to use this video in my class. I believe his arguments for an intelligent creator are good. But I can see a teenager drifting away very quickly while watching this video. It might serve better in a college classroom, and in a science class. I would rather have the students study the Word, and believe by faith that the universe was formed by God's command, rather than study science.
- 18) The Case for Christ's Resurrection. A DVD produced by Grizzly Adams Productions, copyright 2007. In hindsight, I shouldn't have ordered this video. You can already see by the title that this might be a cheesy "knock-off" of Lee Strobel's books and videos. The goal of this DVD is to "prove" that Jesus rose from the dead. I need to take more

time to study this video – it may have a good clip here or there that I could use. What I still need to overcome is its unapologetic approach of proving an article of faith. Included in this video are a pair of 3D glasses. You are supposed to put these glasses on and then view 3D pictures of the Shroud of Turin. These pictures are supposed to convince you that Jesus died and rose. I probably won't use much of this in class, and I'm still in the process of searching for the "diamond in the rough" – a good video clip that helps the students as they ponder the resurrection.

- 19) Why Nobody Learns much of Anything at Church and How to Fix it by Thom and Joani Schultz. Group Publishing, Loveland CO: 1993. I was turned off by the title, but changed my mind as I read the book. In my opinion, it is very helpful. It gives practical advice on teaching methods, and gives some good examples of how to teach the Bible to younger people. Some of its good points are "focus on learning rather than on teaching" (chapter 2), "use active learning" (chapter 6), and "use interactive learning" (chapter 7). I would suggest this book to others. I keep it on my resource shelf and refer to it from time to time. It would probably serve me well to read it again as I continue to tweak this doctrine course.

In summary, there are a plethora of resources one could use as he tries to prepare to teach a doctrine course (or any religion course, for that matter). I have noticed a few things when looking at resources to use for teaching...

- **The Time Factor.** It takes a great deal of time to review, dissect, and adapt a resource for use in a course. The idea, "This resource will save you time" can be true, in some ways. I will save time by not having to create a video clip myself, or by coming up with a good illustration or discussion question myself. But I will lose time (sometimes a great deal of time) by searching for the "diamond" in the "rough" of all the material that I won't use. For example, I just finished reviewing the DVD The Case for a Creator, a Lee Strobel resource that sets out to "prove" the idea that God created the world. The video lasts an hour, with another 40 minutes of "extra features" on the DVD. After watching it, I decided to not use it. In my opinion, it was too technical, and, at times, too boring. It might serve well in a science class that is already going into great detail about the makeup of a protoplasm. But for me, a teacher of the Word, I don't want that much scientific depth. I lost about two hours looking at that video, and determining that I wouldn't use it. On the other hand, the resource mentioned above, The Privileged Planet, has a great "moment" of about 20 minutes, that clearly illustrates to students in an interesting way that this world is very complex, and that the creation doesn't lend itself well to the idea of a chance-happening. Once again, this took about 2 hours to figure out, for 20 minutes of video, and another 20 minutes of discussion.
- **The Passive Factor.** I'm trying more and more to discover and use resources that make the students "active learners" rather than "passive learners." As a student who prefers passive learning, I have a hard time with this. I sometimes recoil at resources that have an active learning element. I need to consciously seek out resources that challenge my natural disposition and personal preference for learning, and utilize resources that might complement the way I naturally like to learn and therefore teach. Showing a video clip to

a student, and asking one question, might seem “cutting edge,” but it’s really promoting more a form of the passive style of learning. I have noticed that I’m drawn to those kinds of resources. I need to start asking myself, as I review a resource, “Does this promote active learning, or passive learning, on the part of the student?”

- **The Bible-Reading Factor.** I’m trying more and more to think of ways to get students to spend time reading their Bibles. Sometimes, the resources I look at send me and the students far away from this practice. It might seem archaic and “old-school,” but I need to find resources that help the student to enjoy and be more comfortable with the concept of *simply reading the Bible* and applying it to himself. It is the Word alone that will cause the student to grow in his faith, and not a smooth or flashy video clip that makes the student laugh or focuses the student so much on science or his own feelings that the idea of God’s Word is lost. I need to start asking myself, “Does this push the student to read the Bible and apply it to himself? Or, are we going in the opposite direction?” More thoughts on promoting devotional Bible reading are contained later in this paper.

In the end, the practice of using resources is a helpful and valuable thing. I believe that my thesis has been driven home during my exploration of resources, that I must change, while teaching the changeless message of the Gospel. In other words, I must look at each resource with the question, “How does this help me better teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Where is the changeless message in this resource?” If I can find that message (and sometimes I can’t in some of the resources I’ve used), I then must ask myself, “How should I change myself, or my course, in order to adapt this resource? How does this resource challenge me to change my methodologies? How should I change this resource, so that it better fits into the course that I am presenting to my students?” The idea of changing is necessary, when utilizing teaching resources. It is very rare to find a resource that could be used “as is.” Also, resources are constantly changing. A great video that presents the Gospel of Jesus Christ and promotes good discussion might be right around the corner. With resources constantly changing, I need to be aware of those things. They style of resources is constantly changing as well. A video from 20 years ago should not be shown today (in my opinion) because the student will be spending too much time noticing how “dated” it is, and not enough time drawing the main points from the video. As a “resource-user,” I need to be constantly changing as I teach the changeless message.

III. The challenges and blessings I’ve discovered while teaching doctrine in a high school setting

A. What worked, what didn’t work, and why

B. Learning about high school students and myself as a teacher

There have been many challenges and blessings that have come my way while teaching a doctrine class to high school students. Perhaps the biggest challenge is “How do I get each student deeper into the Word of God?” Each student comes from a different setting – his or her confirmation class was different from the others. His or her home-life is different. Some students are still new to the faith (a student who isn’t WELS but going to Lakeside anyway) and some are life-long religion students. Some students are more quiet and passive, while others need to have discussion and voice their opinions. Some have a more conservative approach to life, while others are more “liberal” and ask hard questions about everything. How does a teacher get 25 students from all of these different backgrounds to dig deeper into the Word of God? To me, that is a challenge that I’m still wrestling with.

I’ve been very thankful for the blessings that have come while teaching God’s Word to teenagers. I’m obviously benefiting more than anyone else from the preparation and study of God’s Word for these classes. I’ve wrestled with different “why” questions offered by different students, and have been forced to think more deeply about different passages of the Bible than I would have if I had been studying them on my own. Being “pushed” has been a good thing. I’ve grown more this way than if I were to just sit down and read a book. It’s been ironic, really. As someone who is naturally a more “passive learner,” I’ve been placed into an “active learner” position by being a teacher, and have benefited greatly from it.

What follows are some thoughts on my successes and setbacks, high school students and high school teaching, and how some of these things relate to my thesis of “change while teaching the changeless message of the Gospel.”

A. What Worked, What Didn’t Work, and Why

Good Beginnings: I try to start each semester by giving a motivational talk about the value of the Word of God, along with an invitation to ask questions. The students are given a “worksheet” which asks them to fill in a question that they would like answered during the semester, from a religious point of view. Generally, the students have been very good about asking difficult questions.

A problem I’ve encountered is finding ways to “work in” those questions. Sometimes it’s very easy – a question about the trustworthiness of the Bible logically fits into the lesson on verbal inspiration. But what about a question on “smoking” or “dating” or something like that? What about questions that are clearly covered in other courses (“smoking” is covered in health class and “dating” is covered in senior religion). Do I acknowledge those questions? Ignore them entirely? Try to offer a quick answer and a commercial to “stay tuned to next year’s religion class?” I’ve found that students are frustrated if I say, “That will be covered later” etc. It seems that they want the answer “RIGHT NOW” regardless of what is talked about next year in religion class, or regardless of what is covered in health class.

I plan to work every question into the school year, in one way or another. Some questions deserve an entire class period of study and discussion. Other questions require only 5 minutes, or even less. Whatever the question, all of them will be covered, in one way or another.

One idea I'm pondering for future years is for the student to write a little essay entitled, "The Perfect Religion Class." The essay would be brief, but the main point of the essay is for them to communicate to me what they are looking for in the religion class. It would help me to see what they are thinking about, and it would help them to focus on why they are coming to this daily class in the Word of God.

Handouts: For the past 3 years, I've given students handouts. The number one purpose of these handouts is note-taking. The handout presents to the students some of the main points we are supposed to be focusing on. If the student is having a hard time following the discussion in class (either because of the student's lack of attention, or the teacher's lack of logic), the student has a tool sitting on his/her desk that helps to focus on the main points of the class.

Proof passages from the Bible are also printed on those handouts. One might say that this is bad, because the student would be better served looking up each proof passage in his or her own Bible. The problem with that, however, is time. I've tried to take the "combination-approach." Many passages are on the sheet, while some are missing because we are to look them up in the Bible.

Some of the students have complained that the handouts are too repetitive. For every lesson, the sheets contain questions, main points, and passages. This is a weakness of my handouts, and something I need to work on to improve. Perhaps, with time, I will be able to modify the various handouts, so that they don't have the same "look" or format. Time is always a challenge for doing this sort of thing.

The handouts serve their primary purpose of keeping the students focused on the topic at hand. It forces them to write things down while listening, aiding in the learning process. Some of the students I had in class were naturally NOT note-takers, and quickly lost or misplaced their handouts as time went along. To be honest, I was fine with that. Most people, including myself, don't keep their high school religion notes for future reference. What they learn in class, and what sticks in their minds, is most important.

However, I'm wondering if this is the best approach to the idea of holding the students accountable for note-taking. I've wondered how I can make the notes more useful, and have a lasting value for the student. I'm considering some ideas for the future, and here are a few...

- Reward students who hand in their notes, completely filled out. Perhaps with every test, if a student hands in his or her notes, the student will receive some kind of a credit – an increase in grade, either on the test, or on some other assignment. I will have to discipline myself to actually read through (or skim through) the notes that they took, in order to see if they actually did what I had asked them to do. This may help me to see if they actually understood what was being taught, etc. (more on assessment later).
- Encourage the students to write notes into their Bibles. This could happen either during the class, or during the review period before a test. I have found that my class notes "last longer" if I write them into my Bible. Whatever I write onto a separate

piece of paper usually is lost because of organization (where do I now store this note, how do I access it again, etc.). It may take some training and encouraging, but I think it would be worthwhile for the students to start doing this. The “encouragement” may be that I will ask them questions about certain passages (“How does Isaiah 55:11 comfort the Christian who doesn’t think his evangelism efforts are worthwhile?”) The student can open up to that passage, see the note taken in class, and be able to answer the question. This may also help the student develop a life-long skill of writing notes into his or her Bible. Perhaps during a Bible class at church, etc., the student may have that habit, and be able to add valuable information to his/her Bible.

One thing that didn’t work was the idea that “I will give them the basic notes, and add good discussion questions and applications while teaching that section of the notes.” The problem was time constraints. The typical high school day doesn’t lend itself well to spending time searching out and pondering cutting-edge questions and applications. What I learned from this is that everything needs to be prepared well in advance (as much as possible). Otherwise, the applications and class discussions won’t amount to much of anything. To have those questions and applications included on the handouts assures that those discussions and applications will happen. Once again, I will discuss more the idea of daily preparation for classroom teaching later in this paper.

Changing While Teaching... I have modified my handouts every year. Most of the changes have been minor, but still necessary, based on how things went during the previous semester. I’m including more questions and applications, rather than thinking (incorrectly) that I can add them during the school year.

Powerpoint slides: I thought that powerpoint slides would be “the key” in teaching doctrine class – if I have good powerpoints, the students will listen and learn. I have received good feedback about the powerpoint slides from the students – many of them found them to be helpful for keeping their attention and understanding the main points of the lesson. The criticism I have received is that, once again, they are too repetitive. A picture with a few words is helpful, but after an entire semester of that, it doesn’t pack the same “punch.” I’ve also wondered to myself if the students are so inundated with visual images that the novelty of powerpoint has worn off. No longer is a picture good enough – it has to be a moving-picture. Even that isn’t good enough – a video clip is better. And so forth and so on. I haven’t been able to devote as much time as I would like to keeping my powerpoint slides “cutting edge.”

The powerpoint slides served their purpose of making the Word of God more visual to the students. They are helpful, but I don’t think that powerpoints are the key to a good class. Perhaps the main reason why they aren’t The Answer to making the class interesting is because of their passive nature – a powerpoint slide is essentially something you passively look at. It’s good, but it doesn’t “push” the mind to think harder, to struggle with an issue or search in the Bible for an answer. It is just something to look at – passive learning, as opposed to active learning.

Changing While Teaching... I have modified my powerpoints every year. Most of the changes have been minor, but still necessary, keying off of the changes in the notes. Ideally, I would love

to revamp my powerpoints every week, using pictures and clips from current events to illustrate key points in the lesson. However, the reality is that there is a lack of time and energy to do that while the school year is in full swing. Any innovation needs to take place over the summer. I have also started to take “powerpoint breaks” on certain days – we don’t use powerpoint every day, so that it doesn’t become too repetitive.

The General Approach of my Handouts and Slides: I started out using the “myth-busting” (as one student called it) approach to teaching doctrine. In other words, here are the common misconceptions out there, about a certain doctrinal topic. And here is the truth, as the Word of God shows. I have an entire course, based on that approach, entitled “Myth Busting Approach” in my set of files handed in with this project. It seemed to work well, to some degree. Once again, the repetitive nature of that approach got in the way, sometimes, of holding the students attention. As a result, I revamped the handouts and powerpoints so that the “myth busting” wasn’t the one and only way to approach each doctrine. Instead, each doctrine had its own approach. The main emphasis shifted into “proclaiming my faith,” sometimes to unbelievers, and sometimes to skeptics who had arguments. “Myth busting” was included, but became less of an emphasis. Those handouts, along with the powerpoints, are included in the file entitled “Revised Approach.” As I think about this, perhaps I have swung too far away from the “myth busting” approach, and need to swing back more toward the middle. There are a great deal of myths out there, and I’m sure our students are affected by those myths. A more moderate approach to common myths will be something I consider for future courses.

Changing While Teaching... I’ve described how I’ve already done some changes to my approach to this course, the content, etc. I can already anticipate some of the changes I’d like to make for the following school year – planning more active learning moments within each lesson, planning more strategies on getting the students to use their Bibles as we go through different doctrines of the Bible, etc. While reading some of the end-of-year critiques by some of the students, that seems to be the common theme - that the course is too passive, that the student desire more activity as he or she learns. That will be my challenge as I continue to change and modify the course. I couldn’t imagine just teaching the course “as is” next school year. Just when I have some of those things “figured out,” another aspect of the course will need to be changed – the handouts, the powerpoints, the general approach, etc. Every year, the course will need some revamping.

Student Projects: During the first three semesters of teaching the course, I assigned to each student a doctrine from the Bible that they were supposed to illustrate with powerpoint slides. The directions for this are included in a file entitled “powerpoint project.” I thought that this approach would have a number of “pros” – it would encourage active learning by those who were trying to complete the project. It also might hold the attention of the students who would be watching and listening to the presentation. There were moments when the project did what it was supposed to do – the student put forth a great deal of effort, and the students who were watching and listening seemed to enjoy and learn from these presentations.

There were other moments, however, when the presentation didn’t fulfill any of those things, and I discovered some “con’s” to student presentations. One “con” is that the students who were presenting sometimes underachieved and therefore didn’t learn anything. Their under-achieving

also led to the other students (the audience) not learning anything. Another “con” was that the audience, at times, allowed itself to be too passive. Student-listeners in the “audience” would drift, not pay attention, and miss most, if not all, of the presentation. Part of the fault rested upon me as the teacher, not giving enough direction, making too many assumptions that the student presenters and listeners would do a great deal by themselves, etc. Part of the fault rested upon the student, as he put forth as little effort as possible in order to get by.

After three semesters of this approach, I decided to change the student project to something else. Instead of creating a simple illustration for a doctrine of the Bible, the student was assigned a certain section of the notes, and they were required to “teach” that section of the notes, using powerpoint to do so. Once again, I thought that this approach would facilitate active learning and hold the attention of the listeners of this project. This approach seemed to “raise the bar” on the expectations of the students, as they were forced to study a section of God’s Word and present it to their classmates. There were moments when the student presentations exceeded my expectations. There were other moments when I was underwhelmed by the presentations. At times, this was my own fault, as I chose topics that were less than interesting, or that were “below the level” of the students. Generally, the students put forth good effort on their presentations – an improvement from the previous approach. Yet, the same pro’s and con’s were present as they were with the previous approach.

Changing While Teaching... I’ve already been changing my approach to this project-concept. I plan to continue some changes. I intend to combine some aspects of the first approach with the second. I also intend to add more applications to these projects – how does this doctrine of the Bible help me, a teenager, solve some of the problems I face in my life? I would like to “open it up more” for the student to be creative – I could tell that some students felt constrained by my outlines, my notes, etc. – they would have liked to have gone off in a different direction. I also would like to include more Bible reading and application to self and others in this project. This will all take time to develop, and won’t happen if I wait for the school year to do that. It must take place during the summer.

Another student “project” that I’ve required over the past two years is the “Eschatology Project.” Since we always run out of time at the end of the semester to study eschatology, I assign a self-directed Bible study to each student. Each student must independently study many of the eschatological sections of the Bible and fill out a worksheet that corresponds with those sections. During the semester exam period, each student’s work is checked, and then the students are quizzed, almost “confirmation examination style,” on the subject of eschatology. It has worked well over the past two years and has received good comments from the students in their end-of-year critiques. I would like to improve that project, as time allows.

New Project Idea #1 for the future: A new idea that I would like to develop is the idea of a student presentation using the computer program “photostory” to convey Biblical truths to an audience. This past semester, we experimented with this as an alternative to a student project. The student could “make a photostory” (a five minute video which intertwined music, words on the screen, and pictures on the screen) that had a religious element to it. The experiment went relatively well – students typically picked a favorite Christian musician and song, and made a photostory connected to that song. Words from the Bible would appear on the screen, along with

pictures that matched the words of the Bible (or words from the music). After the video, we would have a short discussion about the photostory. The students seemed to really like this idea.

I believe I need to add more structure to this project. One idea would be to create a specific audience for each photostory (this person doesn't know Christ but has some questions, this person isn't sure if she should baptize her baby or not, etc.). The goal of the photostory is to communicate and persuade. Members of the student-audience can watch the presentation and react – what was good, what wasn't so good, etc.

New Project Idea #2 for the future: As I considered the “aiming for a specific audience” approach to presentations (as opposed to just presenting information on a certain topic), another idea I would like to pursue is the idea of “sharing my faith with people who have questions.” Once again, a “target audience” would be created, and the student presentation would be geared toward communicating and persuading a target audience on a certain topic. The target audiences would be people who believe certain myths about Christianity, and the presenters would be given the task of talking about certain doctrines in the context of witnessing. A group of students in the audience could then react, similar to the above idea for photostory, and discuss the good and the bad in the class presentation.

New Project Idea #3 for the future: Besides the two projects above, a third idea is “volunteering as a way to witness my faith.” I've experimented a little with this concept – the student volunteers for a church or church-affiliated organization for 3 hours, and then writes an essay on the topic. Something like this could be useful for the future. Perhaps a class presentation that shows pictures, relates the activity to the Word of God, and encourages others to consider using their time and talents for activities such as this, would be useful.

Drawing these new ideas together: Rather than require a student to do all three of the above ideas, perhaps a better approach is to require a student to do “2 out of 3” of these projects. A student who loves technology would be inclined to do the photostory. A student who doesn't like technology, but likes to “do things” might be more inclined to do the third project. A challenge for me as the teacher is to develop “rubrics” for these new kinds of projects, along with expectations and guidelines for the class audience.

Bible Reading. After teaching doctrine for one year, it became clear to me that I should focus on one “skill” that I would like to develop in the students that they could use for their future life as Christians. Reading the Bible in a devotional way was that skill that I wanted to focus on. First, I need to clearly define (both to myself and to my students) what it means to “read the Bible in a devotional way.”

As I see it, the definition is simple – to thoughtfully read and ponder the Word of God, applying it to my own life and to the lives of others. Looking for the law, looking for the gospel, noting the guidelines for sanctification, rejoicing in the gospel-encouragement to glorify God – all of these things would be included in “devotional Bible reading.” Rather than just dictate to the students this definition, it might be better for me to hold an “open forum” or class discussion, to see if students can come to that definition on their own. As they struggle with that, they might

have a clearer understanding, and higher motivation, to actually read the Bible in a devotional way (as opposed to just getting the assignment done as fast as possible for a grade).

But how do I develop that skill? I'm still trying to figure out the best way to do that. During my second year of teaching doctrine, we would take "breaks" from our doctrinal topics and just read a book of the Bible, while answering about 10 questions from that book of the Bible. I'm not sure if that really worked very well. It was too "schoolish" and not devotional enough. It seemed to me that the students were still just "trying to get the assignment done" rather than relaxing and reading the Bible in a way that benefits themselves. I think I was much to blame for that – expecting a high school student to read an entire book of the Bible over the period of a week, and to do so in a way that's different from completing an assignment – perhaps that was unrealistic on my part. Perhaps I didn't give enough training, or enough examples (maybe I should model it) for those students.

I changed my approach for my third year of teaching the doctrine class. As part of the "Bible" section of doctrine (the "Revealed Knowledge of God" section that is presented early in the semester) we had a "How to Read the Bible" component. My preparation for this was very quick, and didn't result in something that was as good as I would have liked. But it was a start. I produced a piece of paper that contained 99 chapters of the Bible, categorized under the different doctrines of the Bible that we were studying. As we moved from doctrine to doctrine, I would direct the students to that list of Bible chapters, and encourage them to read it in a devotional way. I gave them some direction on how to do this, and often gave them class-time to do this as well. This seemed to be received very well by the students. They did what I had asked them to do, and commented at the end of the year (class critique) that they enjoyed that aspect of it. I'm still not satisfied with that approach and plan to modify it with the goal that each student will be a Bible-reader by the time the semester is over.

Changing While Teaching... I've been changing my way of teaching Bible-reading since the class began, and will continue to do so. Time constraints sometimes prohibit good preparation for teaching this well. My own personal struggles with Bible reading (sometimes I don't do what I'm supposed to do!) can, at times, contribute to that as well. Personal growth and maturity, along with finding more time for preparation, will lead to better teaching of this skill.

I've discovered the "Whole Bible Project" to be a helpful tool for teaching devotional Bible reading. Every Friday, the students are required to complete two worksheets from the "Whole Bible Project" which prove to me that they read the Bible in a devotional way. This was well-received from the students, and seemed to be a good start toward helping them to get comfortable in their time in the Word of God. One negative to this was that it may have been too repetitious – the same kinds of sheets with the same kinds of questions, week after week.

For future attempts at this, I plan to integrate the "Whole Bible Project" with having them to "Luther's 4 Strands" (more of a self-done law and gospel approach.) It seemed to me that sometimes the best approach is... the simpler, the better, when it comes to Bible reading. Just read it, and think about what it says.

Videos and video clips: I had mentioned before my ups and downs with looking into the use of videos and video clips. I don't believe that using videos for long periods of time is useful – pressing “play” and letting the video run for 45 minutes of the class period. It allows the students to become too passive in their learning. It's also rare to find a video that can hold their attention enough to cause learning to take place during that hour. I have found it more useful to find the “5 minute gem” (or 10 or 15 minute gem) within the longer video, and use that as an illustration to a point being made in class.

Besides the challenge of time and effort needed to set that up, there is the other challenge of coordinating with other religion teachers. As I had mentioned above, a valuable resource that I had spent a great deal of time researching turned out to be only moderately useful when I learned that another religion teacher, who teaches a grade level below mine, makes great use of that resource. I have learned to coordinate everything I do with the other religion teachers, and have avoided showing “reruns” of video clips because I've checked in first with others. I'm sure there will still be some duplication, because some of these resources are now being used by parish pastors as well. A running joke among our students is the latest “Luther” movie. They see it in history class, in a religion class (church history), and often times at a youth group gathering in their local parish. If I find a resource that is valuable and helpful, I'm more likely to keep it to myself (which isn't always a good thing), rather than share it with my colleagues, for fear that by the time the student has arrived in my class, he has already seen my favorite resource three times.

Changing While Teaching... New videos and video clips will continue to be produced year by year. As a teacher of religion, I need to constantly “keep up” with what is going on in the area of video resources. I do check out the bluefishtv.com website quite often, along with the pointofpower.com website. It seems to me that the latest approach is to intersperse short video clips during a presentation of a doctrinal topic. The video itself needs to be done in a “modern-feeling” sort of way, or the students will “turn off” quickly. (Showing a video clip from Charlton Heston's Ten Commandments would be a dead-end teaching moment.) The interesting thing about videos is that the “feel” is always slightly changing – the way camera angles are used, the pace, the change in scenes, etc. This is something I could never personally keep up with. It seems wiser to me to trust the “experts” on the internet, such as the people who run the bluefishtv.com website, or the pointofpower.com website. I'm sure that the video clips I use five years from now will be very different from the video clips I'm using now. Constantly devoting time and energy to research of these resources, while communicating with my colleagues, is necessary for me to keep up on this sort of a thing.

Reading assignments: Besides assignments to read certain sections of the Bible, I've required the students to read chapters out of the “More Prepared to Answer” series, and the “People's Bible Teachings” series. Each reading is accompanied by a worksheet that directs the student's attention to the main points I would like them to remember. During my first few semesters of presenting these reading assignments, the students expressed appreciation for them. But this last semester, the students said that they didn't like the reading assignments as much. One factor that contributed to this might be that I have greatly increased the number of reading assignments from the “More Prepared to Answer” series. It might be too repetitive. Some of the sections of the “People's Bible Teachings” series may have been too technical, too deep, and not applicable enough to the life of a high school student.

Changing While Teaching... I believe that I need to change my approach to reading assignments. The first thing is to add more variety to what they read. The “Prepared to Answer” series is good, along with the “People’s Bible Series.” But there are other sources out there that would be helpful as well. Looking into some of these other resources and organizing a “mixed approach” would probably help the student to not get tired of the same style of writing.

Another thing I could do is to “write the worksheet twice.” After the first draft of writing a worksheet that focuses on the main point of the reading, the second draft would be to add more application questions, more discussion questions, and maybe a question or two that directs the student to open up his or her Bible.

Like video resources, I need to constantly be keeping up on these resources. Doctrine won’t change. But the various attacks on the doctrines of the Bible, while similar to attacks that have taken place in the past, will change in “flavor” from time to time. For example, people have always argued that the Bible is not the inspired Word of God. But the various ways of attacking that doctrine do change from year to year. The articles that come out that address this, and other issues, will continue to change. I need to be constantly reading, looking at resources, and talking to colleagues, to get ideas.

Presenting information, asking questions, and starting discussion: My goal is that students would ponder questions that force them to think about their beliefs, and why they believe what they believe. They would be challenged to look into the Bible so that they know what they believe, and why. I’m not sure if my questions always served that purpose. Many of my questions just “touch the surface” of certain doctrinal points, and don’t illicit as much discussion as I would like. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. First and foremost, I am to blame for that. My own natural disposition is that I prefer passive learning – just sitting and listening without pondering, or trying to answer, thought-provoking questions. Since a person naturally teaches how they prefer to learn, I am probably not the best at creating thought-provoking, discussion-starting questions. Another factor that contributes to this lack of discussion is my lack of time for preparation. It takes time and energy to ponder a question that really gets the student thinking. I don’t mean to make excuses for poor preparation, but it has been a challenge this year to prepare well those sorts of questions. The new responsibilities of being an administrator in a high school setting, coupled with little children at home (ages 3, 1, and another on the way), make quiet preparation time hard to come by. Much of my quiet time is spent sleeping.

Besides asking good questions, another goal I have is that the students would interact with each other. This could happen as a result of a discussion question I asked, or as a result of another short activity that I had planned to take place during the class time. In my class critiques, some students have said that they wished that I would have more of this take place in the classroom. I have tried, but with limited success. Once again, my own natural disposition gets in the way of this – I’ve always preferred listening to a lecture over group-work. This gets in the way of me really pouring myself into planning this sort of an activity.

Changing While Teaching... I realize that I need to improve in these areas, in order to be a better teacher of God's Word. With many of the "basics" more or less in place (handouts, powerpoints, student project guides, etc.), I can start to focus more on these sorts of things. I plan to make that a major part of my preparation for the upcoming school year, as time allows. I always pray that God would give me more time and energy to come up with these sorts of things. As I discover more what my weaknesses are, I am more conscious of compensating for those weaknesses by putting forth effort in those areas to improve. I also try to work on making sure that my "strength" – simply presenting the Word of God by talking and visual aids – is done well.

Daily Work and Assignments: So far I haven't given out many daily assignments in my class. My approach has been, "You give me your utmost attention during these 44 minutes of class time. We study the Word together and grow. If you do that, I as a teacher will be happy, and keep the assignment load down." That seems to have worked – their attention is pretty good during the class period. I'm still debating over what would be a helpful and useful set of assignments to give, from day to day. I have heard of how past teachers give a great deal of homework, but much of it was classified (by student and other teachers) as busy-work.

Changing While Teaching... If I could figure out a way of getting each student into the Word of God on their own – to read it on their own time, and to somehow keep that student accountable, I would give more assignments. I really don't have the time to be correcting daily assignments – checking 60 worksheets per day to see if they did their work. I will keep looking for ways to get students into the Word, while being realistic about my ability to hold them accountable.

Writing assignments: I believe that there is great value in getting students to reflect on what they've learned through writing assignments. During my summer quarter classes, I've always inwardly groaned at writing assignments, but then afterwards applauded them. It forces a person to process and organize what they've learned.

Other religion teachers at Lakeside do writing assignments with their students. I haven't done too many because of the time involved in correcting them. I know that my teachers at the seminary didn't instantly (the next day) return our writing assignments. I'm sure it was time consuming to read them and react to them. This past school year, I did one assignment with the students – they were to take three aspects of Christian sanctification (either fruits of the Spirit or definitions of love from 1 Corinthians 13) and write an essay that applies those to themselves. I believe that the students benefited from that exercise, although there were a number of complaints that they were forced to think more deeply than they would have liked.

Changing While Teaching... I would like to do more of these assignments. I need to learn how to correct them in a way that assesses what was written, but also in a way that doesn't consume too much time. I can't afford to give up six hours to read 60 essays, ever other week. There must be a way. I plan to learn as I go.

Incorporating Prayer: At times I have used prayer during the semester, and at other times I have not. That doesn't mean that I didn't pray for my class or my students. What that means is that I didn't say, "OK students, let's all pray before we discuss these things." During one semester I had the students submit short prayers for God's blessing upon our class, and that

seemed to work well, to some degree. Some of the prayers were less than compelling. Sometimes I would forget to use them, because of some issue that was going on in the classroom. In the end, I lost the practice of starting or ending the class with prayer. I believe that I need to change that...

Changing While Teaching... I already have a short lesson on the concept of prayer, as it connects to the doctrine of God's providence. Perhaps it is time for me to add some components to that lesson, including the idea of writing prayers for God's blessing upon this particular doctrine class, for all of the religion classes at Lakeside, for the sharing of God's Word in chapel, etc. There are probably many "prayer starters" that I could use, if I had the time and energy to do so. The time to do that is during the summer, and that will be one of the many changes I make as I continue to tweak this class.

The Use of a Curriculum Map: In this high school setting, all the teachers are required to create a "curriculum map" for the course they teach. This chart basically maps out what is being taught week by week, along with the various activities and assessments that take place along the way. I have found the practice of creating this sort of map useful, as it keeps the teacher "on task" during the school year. It has also become obvious to me that every semester, the map needs to be looked at and modified, because of the experience of the past semester, thus tying into the "changing while teaching" idea. The map I used in 2006 will not be the same as the map I use during the fall of 2008.

News items and doctrine: Every year there are different events taking place in the world of politics, sports, entertainment, and general society that could find application in a religion class. Either the teacher breaks entirely away from the topic at hand, or the teacher finds a way to weave a contemporary topic into the doctrine being taught. Every summer, I plan to look ahead and try to anticipate what might be a hot-button topic that could be brought up in a doctrine class. For example, with the election coming up this fall, the idea of government, church and state, and Christian citizenship would be timely. Incorporating that under either the doctrine of "providence", or the doctrine of "Christ the King," or even under the doctrine of "Church" (as it relates to church and state), would be a good idea. What may be a good idea is to have a "doctrine of the year" that I focus on, based on the world in which we live. Having the goal of reading a book from the "People's Bible Series" every summer, and developing a doctrinal component from that book, would be a worthy goal for me to have every summer. Currently, I am reading Professor Deutschlander's Civil Government in preparation for next school year.

Another resource that I have recently discovered on the web is www.christianheadlines.com. It contains articles that highlight different topics of interest from a religious point of view. I would like to discipline myself to look at that website on a weekly or daily basis, so as to download articles for discussion with my doctrine students.

Changing While Teaching... Obviously, our world, along with the constantly changing news, provides all kinds of opportunities to apply God's Word to real life. The challenge is to stay on top of those things. My weakness is that I like to STAY ON TASK and I hesitate to sometimes take breaks from my curriculum map in order to talk about these things. That may be due to the fact that preparing to talk about these things takes time – time to discover, time to read and

ponder, time to plan for discussion, etc. Where does one find the time for all of that? Through discipline, and through summer preparation, in my opinion. Finding news items over the last year that apply to different doctrines of the Bible isn't too hard. To organize that all while things are slow is possible. To stay on the cutting edge of news and doctrinal applications on a week-to-week basis may not be possible during the school year. If one tries, one ultimately doesn't do any of that, because of lack of time. This will be something I seek to focus on in the months ahead.

B. Learning about high school students, and myself as a teacher...

High School Students...

During the summer of 2007, I attended the summer quarter MPT seminar entitled "Youth Nurture" led by Dr. Joel Nelson and Professor Steven Geiger. I found the course to be very helpful and informative about high school students and how they might think and learn. Much of what follows are main points I learned from that course, along with observations of Lakeside students that confirm those main points.

Their dimensions of intelligence

That MPT course talked about "dimensions of intelligence." In other words, as people learn, different "parts" of their intelligence are utilized. There is the SOCIAL dimension – students desire to interact with each other as they learn. There is the EMOTIONAL dimension – students desire not only to learn dry facts, but to connect what they learn to their feelings. This might also play into the desire to "have more fun" in class (something expressed repeatedly by my students). Maybe the student is saying something negative - "I don't want to really learn, I want to just mess around." But maybe the student, by saying, "I want to have more fun," is expressing that he wants to learn in a more emotional-sort-of way – I want to laugh, to cry, to "feel," as I learn. As a guy that isn't very emotional, I'm working to find more ways of connecting an emotional element to my lessons. This will always be a challenge for me.

There is the CONSTRUCTIVE dimension – students enjoy constructing, or building upon, prior knowledge. There is also a REFLECTIVE dimension – students need to spend time thinking about what they have just previously learned. There is also a DISPOSITIONAL dimension – certain students' dispositions lead them to learn better in the morning as opposed to the afternoon. Certain students' dispositions lead them to be more or less organized, more or less verbal, etc.

I have seen these dimensions among our Lakeside students. A common complaint among my students is that there is not enough "group work" – they want to work together more (sometimes for less than constructive reasons – they just want to talk with their friends). They seem to really tune into lessons where there is more of a social dimension. They also desire more applications that appeal to their emotions – what they really care about as high school students right now–

their social situations, their friends and dating life, etc. Lessons that go into those areas seem to hold their attention more than lessons that I just dryly teach – here are the facts.

I have the most success in student participation when I key into the constructive dimension – when I say to them, “We’ve learned this doctrine. Now what Bible story applies to that doctrine?” All kinds of participation come from that. I’ve also learned to use class time for reflective purposes. Rather than use every minute of every class period for teaching, I will “quit early” from time to time so that the student can write a reflective paragraph on what they have just learned. The work I have received has usually been good.

It is also very true that there is a dispositional dimension to the students. Some students are very organized, very good note takers, very good question-answerers. Others have a very opposite disposition. Discovering which student is which, and reacting to those different dispositions, provides a new set of challenges every semester.

Their need to avoid habituation and to receive jolts.

The 2007 MPT course also talked about the idea of “habituation” and “jolts.” Habituation basically means that a student has stopped paying attention, because of the monotony of the way things are being taught. The classroom activities have become too “habitual.” I have seen this among my students from time to time. Too much of the same sort of handouts or powerpoint slides will eventually make even the best students drift away. Using the same teaching methods, or the same teaching outline (first we’ll do this, then we’ll do this, etc.) will create habituation. I’m always trying to avoid this, but it isn’t easy, when you teach every day in a classroom setting.

A “jolt” is something that interrupts what is going on in the mind of the student. Something changes – a sound, a visual, a thought – something is different (the camera angle on a TV show changes, for example). The MPT seminar talked about how many “jolts” are on TV – from 10 per minute in 1978 to about 30 per minute today. The basic point is that if you have too few jolts in your classes, you will lose your students. I’m always trying to vary my voice, and my location, while teaching. Powerpoint slides are changing. Questions are being asked, people are being required to read the Bible, etc. On days when I have more energy to do this, I can see the students paying attention more. On days when I forget to move around and vary my voice and do other “jolt”-type things, the students seem to pay attention less.

Their visual, auditory, and kinesthetic needs.

The MPT seminar also introduced me to what I call the “VAK-Principle.” Students are VISUAL – they need to create pictures in their minds of different concepts. They need to see the teacher move around and use gestures as he teaches. Students are also AUDITORY – they need to hear themselves respond to what they have learned. Answering questions, doing group discussions, and other talking-activities are necessary for many students. Students are also KINESTHETIC – they need to sometimes take breaks, stand up, sit down, move around, and use their bodies as they learn. Different students have different levels of needs in these three areas. I know that for myself, I am primarily visual, with some auditory needs. I have very little kinesthetic needs

when learning a concept. Some of my students are the opposite. I'm always striving to reach those auditory and kinesthetic learners with Word of God activities that require talking or moving. It isn't always easy, but it's obvious when I "get them" and when I don't.

Their need for the "Four G's"

The MPT course talked about the four G's of teaching, and I have seen the need for those four G's during my teaching experience. They are...

- "Get my attention." The challenge is to make the student curious enough to listen and to stay listening.
- "Give me something." The challenge is to keep the student involved, and to not just lecture the student about the same old things over and over again.
- "Get something out of me." The challenge is to give the student opportunities to apply what he has learned.
- "Go make a difference." The challenge is to give the student the opportunity to do something with what he has learned.

When I introduce a doctrine in the context of a real-life situation, and follow through with that situation, I have succeeded in carrying out the first "G." When I have lacked time to prepare that sort of a thing, I can tell that the students aren't really listening.

The second "G" is especially challenging, since most of the students have gone through these doctrines before, with excellent teaching done by their pastors. I need to give the student more than just a "rehash" of what they learned three years ago. I'm still learning about that one. The goal is to apply doctrine to what is going on in their lives RIGHT NOW, as opposed to what they experienced in the past, or might experience in the future. When I have hit the "right now" applications, I've found them to be paying more attention.

I'm developing ways to tap into the third "G" with student projects, but I believe that I still have a ways to go. The fourth "G" is related, and I'm working on developing ways of "using" what they've learned about certain doctrines of the Bible for practical purposes, such as sharing faith.

What a challenge it is, when you think of the above "differences" among students. Each one varies from the other, in his or her learning needs. This certainly connects with what the Bible says about us, that we are all different, that we all have different functions within the body of Christ (and therefore a different personality). What Paul writes is very true: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:4-5). The challenge for a teacher is to show Christian love to each member of the body of Christ who is sitting in the classroom. Christian love compels us as teachers to learn about our students – their differences – and to challenge ourselves to teach in such a way that helps each individual student to learn the truths of the Bible. Only with the help of the Holy Spirit can this be done.

The student as an active or passive learner

One other thing taught at that MPT course that I found to be especially valuable was the idea of different kinds of learning. I've referred to this before while talking about "active learning" as opposed to "passive learning." The MPT course looked at students from two different views: the traditional view and the service-learning view.

The traditional view of a student is... "Teens utilize resources. Teens are passive. Teens are consumers. Teens need help. Teens are recipients. Teens are victims."

Seeing students this way contributes to the "passive learning" approach I've mentioned. I'm sure that I've struggled with this view of my students from time to time. To consciously pull away from this view, to the service-learning view, seems to help me, and my students, in the classroom setting. That view looks at students in a very different way...

The service learning view is... "Teens act as resources. Teens are active. Teens are producers. Teens offer help. Teens are givers. Teens are leaders." This way of looking at students leads to the more "active learning" approach that I've been striving for in my class. This requires more preparation on my part as a teacher, but it seems to create more situations in the classroom where the students are more attentive and learning. This view has motivated me to create more student projects, more student discussion moments, and other "student-based" rather than "teacher-based" teaching methods in class.

I'm very appreciative of the things I learned while attending the MPT Youth Nurture seminar during the summer of 2007. Much of what I learned became very observable among high school students in doctrine class. Besides those observations listed above, there have been other aspects of the high school student I've noticed during my short time in the classroom...

Different levels of sanctification. This might seem obvious, but it can really stand out, when you have 25 students all together in one classroom every day, talking about the Word of God. Each student varies on how much they know and believe – student comments reveal different levels of "depth" of faith in Jesus Christ, and knowledge of all of his promises contained in the Word. Student effort will vary from student to student – some see their faith as of the utmost importance in their lives, and their work will reflect it. Others put forth less effort, and need constant evangelical admonition to try harder. Student attention varies – some see the Word as something they will pay the utmost attention to, even if the lesson is not taught exactly to their learning style. Others won't pay attention unless you are fortunate enough to have prepared the perfect lesson that exactly meets all of their learning needs ever minute of the class period.

Recognizing that there are different levels of sanctification helps me find peace when some students' comments aren't to the level of what I was hoping for in class, or when a student's effort or attention isn't as high as I would like it to be. On the other hand, I need to be careful not to attribute all of that to "Well, the student must have a lower level of sanctification – that must be why he said that or didn't do that." The other side of the coin is that I may be at fault for not reaching the student with my teaching methods. Balancing those two concepts on a daily basis can be a challenge.

“Get this done” syndrome. Most students fight this syndrome – that every assignment (which often is reading the Bible or a Bible-related article) is just an assignment that must be done as quickly as possible. But isn’t this the Word of God, that you read to strengthen your faith? It is a struggle, sometimes, to get the student to slow down in his reading of the Word, to take the “growth in faith” approach to studying the Bible and Bible-related articles. “This is more than just an assignment you must GET DONE!” is a repeated comment I make in class. I sometimes will take breaks from teaching, and have the students do Bible reading in class, and encourage them to slow down and read in a more pondering, thinking-sort of a way. I’m sure this “syndrome” among students stems from another issue...

Competition with other classes. The student is always faced with the pressure of completing assignments from a variety of different classes. This is why even the best of Bible students will, from time to time, be doing homework from another class (math especially) during the hour of religion class. Sometimes a student will neglect his religion assignment because of the requirements of other classes. Student fatigue can be an issue. This is why I have made student handouts for every lesson – something to cover the desk, so that another course’s work won’t be there. I also try to schedule student projects at different times than the end of the semester, when other classes all seem to schedule the due dates of certain projects. This idea of competition is always there, and can be seen sometimes in student behavior during my class.

Social self-consciousness. For some students, it is very important to “look cool” in front of their classmates. They might offer a very good point to a class discussion, but then have to quietly apologize to their friends for looking like a “teacher’s pet” because they participated. There is the fear of saying something stupid in front of others. Some students really don’t like talking in front of others because they have perceived that others think that they’re weird or stupid (when in fact that isn’t true). Some of this social self-consciousness will get in the way of my desire to have a class discussion on a certain topic. Sometimes it will lead to no discussion, or only certain people always raising their hands. Sometimes it has helped to allow students to sit near their friends (they are given more self-confidence when they’re best friend is sitting next to them approving) and sometimes it has not helped to allow students to sit next to their friends (because they’re too busy being social rather than focusing on the task at hand). I’m still learning how to deal with students this way.

The number one issue, which connects to my main thesis of this project, is that the **teacher must always be changing, while teaching the changeless message of the Gospel.** Why?

Because the students themselves are always changing. Students change in their level of sanctification. Students change in their view of religion class (whether or not it’s just another course to “get done” as it competes with other courses). Students change in their level of social self-consciousness (the more mature ones seem to care less what others think of them). The needs of students, as listed above, will change from year to year, and sometimes from week to week.

Students are changing in other ways as well. Family relationships are always changing for the student – his or her parents get along for awhile, and then a divorce takes place. More and more students are coming from families that could be described as “non-traditional.” This, along with

all the other issues that accompany family and home-life issues, provide the teacher with a set of students who might not be the same as the class he saw five years ago. And a student in September might experience many of these changes before the end of the school year in May.

Throughout the school year, the student is changing physically, mentally, and emotionally. You can see the days when students are having good days and bad days. The brain is changing, resulting in behavior that, at times, can be unpredictable. “Why did he do this? Why did she say that?” The answer, sometimes, is because of the changes taking place in that student, as he or she grows from a grade school child into a young adult.

All of these changes make it necessary for the teacher to constantly be “on his toes” and ready to change, sometimes from day to day or from year to year. Being able to think on your feet, and being able to sometimes “wing it” when it looks like students are in a “certain place” (they’re more hyper and talkative today – let’s have a discussion!) can be helpful to the educational process.

Another reason the teacher must always be ready to change is because the “class personality” can change from one year to the next. One incoming class is more verbal – they seem to get along with each other more, and are less socially self-conscious. As a result, there is more discussion, certain activities work well, and the teacher thinks to himself, “I’m finally figuring out how to get the students involved!”

The next class is quieter. They don’t all get along as well. Many of them are socially self-conscious. They like to listen, and to privately respond by means of writing assignments. Class discussions are harder to start and maintain. Certain activities crash and burn. The teacher may think to himself, “I need to figure out how to get students more involved in my class!” Perhaps the changing face of the class, from one year to the next, contributes to this. If a teacher can anticipate this, and modify his techniques from year to year, less frustration might result.

Another reason the teacher needs to constantly be changing is because the students’ world is constantly changing. As I mentioned before, the family lives of students seem to be changing as time goes on. Besides those family changes, the culture is changing. Methods of communication are changing. While the core sins of our world stay the same (immorality, materialism, relativism, worship of self, etc.), the ways those sins are promoted are constantly changing (texting, instant messaging, internet movies, etc.) The way those core sins “look” in our culture seem to be changing (homosexual happiness on TV sitcoms, the “coolness” of gambling, etc.).

Other aspects of the “teenage world” that continue to change are the political climate (pre- and post- 911, for example), and the economic climate (optimism of the 90’s vs. pessimism of the 2000’s, good times vs. recession and high gas prices, etc.). As the students’ world continues to change, the teacher must constantly be keeping up on those issues, and finding applications for students, so that they can see that the one thing in life that doesn’t change, the Word of God, gives them stability and strength as the world around them continues to swirl in unpredictable directions.

In summary, a teacher of God's Word must continue to "keep up" on how high school students think and learn, and what changes might be taking place in their lives. As Luther said, "Since we are preaching to children, we must also prattle with them" (What Luther Says, quote 1321). In other words, we as teachers need to continue to learn about the people we are teaching. We must, in some ways, enter into their world to understand them better as we seek to share the Word with them and help them to mature in their faith and lives of sanctification. This will motivate the teacher to continue to change, to revise, and to adjust his teaching methods in order to reach the students he is teaching.

Learning about myself as a teacher...

I believe that another reason a teacher will always be changing is because he, as a Christian, is always changing. As a Christian who is studying the Word of God and experiencing ups and downs in my life of sanctification, I am not the same exact Christian as I was ten years ago. I am more aware of my sin, more shortcomings, and have experienced more negative consequences because of my sin. I have seen more sin in the lives of people around me, and have been directly affected more by the sins of others. I have also grown in my faith that my sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ. I have experienced God's grace more as I've taken my various sins to him for his forgiveness. I have remembered my baptism more, and have applied my baptism to more and more of the situations I've experienced in my life. My thoughts while taking the Lord's Supper have changed throughout the years. I'm still receiving Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, but I'm more conscious of the sins that I'm forgiven while at the Lord's Table. I've gone through tests from God. I've studied the Word. To summarize – I'm not the same Christian that I was in the past. This affects me as a teacher of Christian doctrine. My teaching will change, because I'm changing in my life of faith.

I'm also changing in my personal life. A single man living in an apartment is not the same teacher as a married man with two children living in a house. Someone who has never left Wisconsin is not the same teacher as someone who has traveled the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. These, and other personal experiences, have changed who I am from the person I was when I graduated from the college. This will obviously change me also as a teacher – some of the lesson applications I make will be different. My reaction to students' comments and behavior will be different. As a teacher, I'm always changing, because my personal life is changing.

Finally, I believe that a teacher is always changing as he learns more about himself and the students he is teaching. I am more aware of my shortcomings and natural dispositions than I was awhile ago. I know that I prefer the "lecture method," that I am weak when it comes to starting and keeping a discussion going, and things like that. I'm more aware that this might be a result of my preference for learning – I'm a little more quiet than other students – I like to listen, to not get into class debates, to respond with writing assignments, etc. This might be why I have a natural leaning toward those teaching styles. I'm also more aware, by means of experience, that I don't have a great deal of patience for correcting, and I don't have as much self-discipline as I ought to sit up at night and correct student assignments at home.

You may have noticed in this paper a recurring theme: “I’m having difficulty finding time to really prepare this or that aspect of the class.” As I learn more about myself as a teacher, I’ve discovered that I need to discipline myself better so as to prepare in a more complete way for teaching. Formerly, I would “squeeze time in” for class preparation during the school week. As I continued to get more and more swept away by other responsibilities, it has become clear to me that I need to structure preparation time into my school day. My new approach is to structure one class period per day as “prep time.” My door will be closed. Secretaries will be notified. If an emergency arises, I will interrupt my “prep time.” But this will become a scheduled part of my day, not to be interrupted by phone calls and student questions about trivial things such as dress code, etc.

As I become more aware of these things, I change the way I teach. I try to capitalize on my strengths. I try to put effort into compensating for my weaknesses, so that they don’t get in the way of God’s Word. I try new things out, and as I do, I find out what works and what doesn’t, which causes me to change even more. I learn from others, I read, I attend classes and seminars, and as I do, I change as a teacher. I grow in my understanding of what students need, and what I need to do in order to reach them. In this way, I am constantly changing as a teacher.

The Apostle Paul talked about being adaptable when he said, “I have become all things to all men, so that by all possible means, I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul was always changing, as a teacher of the Gospel. When teaching Jewish people, he became more like a Jew. When teaching those who had strong feelings about the ceremonial law, he changed to accommodate them. To Gentiles who didn’t have a ceremonial law, he changed to accommodate them. To Christians who had an overly sensitive conscience about various ceremonial laws, he adapted himself to them. (1 Corinthians 9:19-22). Paul continued to change, based on his circumstances and his audience. I believe this applies to the teacher of high school students as well – one must constantly be changing while teaching the changeless message of the Gospel. The motivation is love. Love for Jesus Christ. And love for the people God has placed under his care.

IV. The most recent course

A. Its strengths and weaknesses

B. How it could be reworked and adapted for future courses

The religion course I’ve used for teaching doctrine to 11th graders at Lakeside Lutheran High School has already gone through some revisions. I plan on revising it again for next school year. It is difficult to keep track of all the courses (version 1, version 2, etc.). I have included my first approach to teaching this course, the “myth-busting” approach, as described by one of my students. This past school year, I’ve revised it so that the “myth-busting” approach isn’t the primary and only way I approach each doctrine. This is called the “revised” approach, in my set of files handed in with this paper. What I would like to do in this section is to summarize the

most recent course, consider its strengths and weaknesses, and look ahead to reworking and adapting it for future semesters of teaching.

An Overall Look at the Course

Topics Covered: The doctrines we cover follow the basic outline of the Apostle's Creed. We begin with a look at the natural knowledge of God, we move to the revealed knowledge of God, and then look at the various doctrines as they are introduced by the articles of the Apostle's Creed – God the Father and his creation, preservation, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, etc. During the semester, this outline seems to work well – everything flows in a logical order, and there are plenty of places to insert such topics such as prayer, stewardship, and Bible reading.

The strength of this approach is that it is very logical and lends itself well to adding other topics that might be pertinent to the student's life. The weakness of this approach probably lies within me, the teacher. I hesitate to leave the outline when there are "teachable moments." I like to "stick to the script," when maybe I should be more willing to address topics that might be on the minds of the students.

As I rework this course for future use, I would like to add this element – at the beginning of every unit, I give an introduction as to what we will be talking about – the various doctrines and questions that will come up. The students will then be asked to write a question that they would like answered in connection with the topics at hand. This would help me to anticipate what "side-issues" students might be interested in, and motivate me to prepare more "side trips" during the semester.

In the past, I have started out the semester by asking the students to submit a question to be answered during the semester. I have already mentioned this idea earlier in this paper, under "Good Beginnings" on page 13. That worked somewhat well. The weakness was that I asked them to do this at the beginning of the semester, when the students were still "cold" in their thinking process. Sometimes the students would ask questions that went far away from just about anything related to the Word of God. When I would avoid the question, the student would then get angry that I wasn't applying the Word to his or her real life. Using this new idea, the "unit-by-unit approach" to student-submitted questions, I will hopefully receive more Bible-related questions that have a connection to what we are talking about in class.

Memory Work: All of the religion courses at Lakeside require students to memorize passages from the Bible and portions of the catechism. Most classes do this on a weekly basis. I look at the doctrines and topics we are covering, and will cover, in my class. I then pick key passages that connect to the content of the class. The student is required to write those passages from memory, once per week. Each passage is introduced by a question that the passage answers. For example, I would write, "How much of the Bible is useful?" The passage would then be, "All Scripture is God-breathed, and useful for..." (2 Timothy 3:16).

The strength of this approach is that it applies the passages to whatever we are talking about in class. It shows the student how the Bible answers questions people ask. The weakness of this

approach is habituation – every single week, we do the same thing. The school year grinds on, and this becomes a mundane task. Also, many students don't even bother to consider the questions that precede the passages – they just want to memorize the passage, write it down, and complete the assignment.

As I look ahead, I plan to modify my memory work approach. I will continue to normal way of doing things – writing passages on a weekly basis. At times, I will ask for volunteers to recite it in class. I also plan to have students write questions that the passages answer. For example, if the passage states, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command” (Hebrews 11:3), the student would be asked, “What question does this passage answer?” I’m sure some students will come up with simplistic questions. But some might come up with the question, “Why do I believe that God created the world? The answer is faith – I trust his Word” or something of that nature, something that forces the student to think about what the passage actually means.

Student Projects: This past semester, each student was required to pair up with another student, and to give a class presentation. I talked about my initial attempts earlier in this paper, on page 16 under “Student Projects.” The students were to present a certain section of the notes, which I gave to them in advance. I gave them direction on where to find information, and what kinds of visual aids were required (powerpoint). Throughout the semester, each student group would give a presentation on a certain doctrine of the Bible, as it came up in the notes. Two students would be in the front. They would talk, show their powerpoint, and the other students would listen. It broke up the class – it wasn’t just me, every day, standing in the front of the classroom talking.

The strength of this approach was that there was student involvement and active learning on the part of the participants. The classmates who were listening seemed to be more attentive when their peers were in the front. The students learned how to serve each other with the Word of God. The weakness of this approach was that the students who were watching were passive. Sometimes they wouldn’t pay attention until I stood up and summarized what the student group had presented. The presentations at times seemed a little stiff and forced, because the student groups had to follow my notes. Perhaps they felt a little limited by that.

For future courses, I would like to put every problem into the context of a teenage problem that needs to be solved. A question or problem is presented, related to the doctrine at hand. The students consider different ways of solving the problem. They then check God’s Word, and come up with a final conclusion. I’m also considering having the students read chapters of the Bible that are directly connected to the doctrine at hand, and then providing study guides for their classmates, that we all need to fill out together. Another possibility is for the students to write quizzes to give to their fellow classmates after they present their project. Another option, one that I’m strongly considering, is that each student group does one of the following above, along with creating a visual illustration of the doctrine of the Bible that we are covering. *I plan on emphasizing less the idea of students teaching my classnotes, and more the idea that students supplement my classnotes with their problem-solving and illustrating.*

Class Handouts: Every unit has a set of notes that focuses on the doctrines at hand. Each set of notes contains questions, key proof passages for certain doctrines, and some applications. I've already described my initial attempts of class handouts earlier in this paper, on page 14.

The strength of these handouts is that it helps the students focus on the main points of each lesson. They serve as visual aids for the lessons at hand. The passages on the sheet help move the class along, since we don't have to wait for each student to find each Bible passage. The approach to each doctrine is varied so as to avoid monotony – sometimes we look at myths that the Bible “de-bunks,” sometimes we look at problems that the Bible solves. The weakness of these handouts is that they often don't “follow-through” with the introduction to the doctrine. The beginning of the lesson catches the attention of the student, but it doesn't hold their attention, because the introductory problem or illustration is dropped, and not carried to the end of the lesson. Sometimes these handouts can be monotonous in their approach – the same style of type, the same “look” for every lesson – not very visually stimulating.

For future revisions, I would like to work more on having the lessons focus on a main issue that is solved by a certain doctrine of the Bible. I will need to rework the notes so that main problem isn't introduced on page one of the notes, and then dropped or lost by the time we get to page three. For Bible passages on the notes, I would like to start “blanking out” some of the key words of each passage, so that the student must pay attention for those key words and write them when he hears them read in class – this would help the student pay closer attention to those passages. I would like to include a “find this doctrine” section in each unit – a student is to read a chapter of the Bible, and try to find a particular doctrinal idea contained in that chapter. We could do the same thing as we listen to music or look at hymns from the hymnal. I would like to look for more discussion questions that would start up class discussion and include them in the notes, so that I don't forget to do that sort of a thing. I also would like to include a “symbol” section from time to time, that looks at common Christian symbols and how they relate to the doctrines we have discussed in class. Perhaps one group of symbols per article (First Article symbols, Second Article symbols, etc.) Finally, I may do something as simple as change the font style of the notes, from one topic to the next, just to add some variety to their appearance.

Reviews and Assessments: Currently, every Tuesday is a “memory work day.” Since we are already writing on Tuesdays, I also consider that day to be my “review” day. I ask quiz-questions from the previous week's lessons as part of their review. These open-note quizzes are then graded and returned. At the end of every unit, we also have a test. These tests are basically multiple choice and true/false, with some short answer questions. At times, I will have them write paragraphs that reflect on past lessons, and what they have learned, and ask them to hand in those paragraphs.

The strength of this approach is that it's predictable – every Tuesday is the day. There is motivation to take notes, because you can use your notes to take quizzes. The questions help the student to focus on the main points we had discussed the week before. For some who are unclear on what we had talked about, it helps them to see the main points of our lessons. The tests make the students think and hold them accountable for paying attention and studying, but don't create ten hours of work for the teacher to correct.

The weaknesses of this approach is that it might be too predictable – every Tuesday, it’s the same old thing. I also struggle to offer variety on my quizzes – besides short answer, there are other ways of checking understanding. Some of these assessments might not be as practical or as “real-world” as one would like in a religion class – it makes the class feel too much like every other academic class. I also don’t review things from previous units once I’m in a new unit. Perhaps some of what they have learned is forgotten.

In the future, I plan to experiment more in the area of both “formative assessments” (evaluating recent learning by using question and answer and discussion) and “summative assessments” (evaluating learning over a longer period of time using tests, quizzes, etc.). Up until this time, I believe I’ve been leaning too heavily toward summative assessments, and have ignored the potential for formative assessments. Here are some ideas I’d like to pursue...

Formative assessments:

- Retaining in some form a weekly quiz on Tuesdays, using questions that apply what they have learned to real-life situations.
- At least once per week, I would create a question that the student must answer in two sentences or less, using a Bible quote to back up what he or she is saying. This could be done in a written format, and then handed in. Essentially, this becomes the “most important point of the week.” The question could be something like, “I still don’t understand why I can’t take communion with you – we both believe in Jesus,” or “Do you believe Christians have to decide to accept Christ” etc. The student is given 2 minutes to write the answer, and then he hands in the answer. Another way to approach this is, “Explain how important the doctrine of Jesus’ resurrection is, using 1 Corinthians 15.” I could then read their answers and assess whether or not everyone is getting it – who is, who isn’t, and what I can do to improve.
- Once per week, I can play “Devil’s Advocate” or “Unbeliever’s Advocate” and ask a certain question of the students. Perhaps I can put a few of them on the spot. Once again, this could go toward the “most important point of the week.” However, here the way of assessing things is more by hearing class discussion than by writing things down. Ultimately, the goal is that the student is forced to ponder the Word of God, and listen to others try to ponder the Word of God. As I hear their responses, I can assess whether things are being learned properly, deeply enough, etc., and make adjustments accordingly.
- Students pairing, and sharing, as they do some of the above activities. This may lead to better class discussion, since the students have heard what the other one (of their pair) has said, and has more confidence to speak in front of their peers.
- Once every other week (or so), I would ask the students to write “paragraph-assignments” – students reflecting on what they have learned and applying it to their current lives. It might be in the form of a letter to an unbeliever, a struggling friend who is weak in the faith, a friend who has fallen away from the faith, etc. Somehow, they use what they have learned from the Bible to help another person. I’m also considering the idea of having students write “letters to themselves.” For example, “Someday, when all of my friends and teachers believe in evolution, and I am feeling pressured to do the same, I must remember this...” and then they write their “reflection” to themselves, keeping it (somehow) for future reference. As I

read their work, I would assess whether they understood and applied to themselves the most important point(s) of the week.

- As I assess what students know (so as to adjust teaching for the next few weeks), I would like to add “pre-quizzes” before each unit or lesson to draw the student’s attention to certain key problems and passages that solve those problems. Listening (or reading) their answers may make it obvious to me what areas need more discussion and what areas need less.

I’m sure there are other ideas for formative assessments. Even something as simple as adding a real-world application question right after teaching a main point - just to see what the response might be - would be helpful in assessing whether or not the student has learned the main points of the lesson.

Keeping the idea of assessment in my mind as I try to start discussion in the classroom is important. Sometimes as teachers, we’re just happy to get a discussion going. This can be good, but it can also get way off the track. Having the idea of “discussion with a purpose” in my mind would help me to redirect any far-flung discussion into the direction of the main point of the lesson.

Here are some ideas for summative assessments...

- Currently, I have about 5 tests per semester. Each test consists of multiple choice, true false, and short answer. It becomes very clear, very fast, which students were paying attention and learning during the semester, and which students weren’t. It also becomes very clear which points were “muddy” in the minds of the students, and which points were obvious and clear. In the future, I plan to continue using these tests. I tweak them every semester, since certain concepts receive different levels of emphases from semester to semester, depending on the students in the classroom.
- Reviewing for the tests: This past semester, I set aside the class period before the test day as a “review day.” Students broke out into groups and worked on a review sheet together (or part of a review sheet). After a certain period of time, the students would then gather together as a class and present their portion of the review sheet. It seemed to work well as a learning and reviewing activity. As far as a tool for assessment, it also served that purpose. I could see which students clearly understood certain topics, and took them deeper. It was also obvious to me which students barely understood anything, and couldn’t think of things in a deeper way.
- I’d like to change things as I consider these review days. Instead of just regurgitating the main points of each doctrine, I’d like to give each group a “problem to solve” using different doctrines of the Bible. They’d be forced to think of what the doctrine actually means, where it could be found in the Bible, and how it applies to the “problem” they are facing. The group would present their answer to the class, and the class would then decide whether it was an acceptable answer or not. The class would also learn from each other this way.
- Including material from past units: As I do summative assessments (tests), I need to begin to include the main points from past units of material. Currently, I leave that material behind

and move on to the next unit, not looking back on what we had learned in previous units. My main reason for this is a flaw in organization. What are the five most important points to remember from unit one? From unit two? I need to start including these points on review days and test days. This would help me to assess whether the students actually retained anything from a past unit, or if they just quickly crammed material for a test, only to be forgotten later.

- Alternative summative assessments: I'm still wrestling with activities that could be used to assess (summative) learning – activities that could replace a test. I've thought of asking students to write lengthy letters or lengthy essays that reflect the main points I'd like them to include. Another idea is for the student to somehow translate what they learned into a "story", as long as that story includes the main points of each doctrine. At this point, I'm not comfortable with those kinds of summative assessments because of the issue of correcting. If 100 students each write 6 pages of material (an essay or letter or story), I would have to correct 600 pages of material, looking for certain points in those 600 pages. That just isn't feasible.
- However, it might work if I allow one or two students per test to do that. There may be a reason to allow a student to do an alternative assessment (the student can't take tests, the student has learning issues, etc.). Or, a student who is extremely creative and feels frustrated and limited by standard assessment activities might want to "express himself" while showing what he has learned over the last four weeks. Student projects or essays or stories might serve well as alternative summative assessments, depending on the situation and students involved.
- In the end, my most important task in the area of summative assessments is to measure the learning of the student. I need to know the five or six things I want the student to remember for his life of faith. I need to know how deeply I want that student to know those five or six things. And I need to create a tool where a student can express those five or six things in a way that is visible to me, and can be corrected in a reasonable amount of time. Currently, the tests and quizzes I give do serve that purpose, to some degree. But there is always a great deal of room for improvement. If I revise the tests to focus primarily on the five most important points of the unit, and to require each student to take those five points to a deeper level, then I have done something positive. I will be working on that in the future.

Unit One: Natural Knowledge of God through Bible Reading.

Natural Knowledge. We look at atheism and agnosticism, and how incomplete the natural knowledge of the law is. We apply it to someone who is content with his natural knowledge of the law. We look at Romans 1, and get into the side-topic of homosexuality, because it is addressed in connection with the natural knowledge of God. A striking video clip is shown, and the application is made that the Word alone can change a person trapped in that sin. The need and the value of the Word is emphasized.

The strength of this approach is that it places the student into the context of witnessing. The side-topic is of interest to the students. The weakness is that the lesson loses focus on the application of witnessing, and sometimes goes off in different directions. For future use, I plan to really work in the idea of witnessing to content agnostics and keeping that idea throughout the entire look at this doctrine. The comment, "I already know enough about God" will be the key to looking at this doctrine. Hopefully the student can see what a blessing the natural knowledge of God is, when it comes to witnessing. God has already built a "common ground" for an unbeliever and a believer to walk upon. The believer can use that common ground of natural knowledge to share the Gospel, as the opportunity arises.

The Bible and Verbal Inspiration. We review basic facts about the Bible, look at some myths about the Bible, and address common complaints about the Bible. The students pair off to figure out how to respond to these common complaints. The reliability of the Bible is examined with a video clip. We read an article from "More Prepared to Answer" and discuss the apologetics and background of the Bible.

The strength of this approach is that it puts the doctrine into the context of questions asked by the skeptical world. The weakness is that we are going "all over the place" with the different questions being asked. At times, it felt like we weren't getting deep enough into the meaning of verbal inspiration. For future use, I plan to pull together skeptical questions about the Bible under a common theme: "I don't read the Bible because I don't trust it." The main point of this doctrine will be, "You can trust the Bible because..." and then we address the questions. Students will be assigned a different "angle" of this debate. I might drop the article from "Prepared to Answer" and keep the video clip because they seem to replicate each other. "By Scripture alone" will be highlighted here – one of the three "Sola's" of Lutheranism.

Law and Gospel. We take a very brief look at the two main teachings of the Bible – law and gospel. Key passages are read and a couple discussion questions are raised. We read Romans 3 and highlight the key law and gospel passages.

The strength of this approach is that it is very clear and simple – these are the two main teachings of the Bible. You can't miss it. The weakness is that it is probably too simplistic. There is also very little application to the life and problems of a high school student. For future teaching, I plan to put this doctrine into the context of the problem, "I hate reading the Bible because it makes me feel guilty." We will look at the presence and purpose of the law, and the gospel, and apply it to ourselves and people we talk to about the Bible. We will begin to read sections of the Bible in a devotional way, using Luther's Four Strands, and applying those four strands (especially the law-gospel emphases) to ourselves. Through this exercise, the student will hopefully see more vividly these two very important doctrines.

Bible Reading. My initial attempts and thoughts on Bible reading are included earlier in this paper, on page 18, under "Bible Reading." For the most recent course, in connection with the above doctrines, I introduce to them the idea of reading the Bible throughout the semester in a devotional way. We look at two very simple ways of studying a section of the Bible – something similar to Luther's "Four Strands," and the "most important passage" approach (finding what the student believes to be the most important passage, and then he writes a sentence that applies it to

himself). We “try out” reading the Bible in a devotional way to see how long it takes, and we “practice” different ways of doing it in class. The student receives a sheet of paper listing 99 chapters of the Bible, with the encouragement to read them (they are organized topically to reflect the doctrines we talk about in class) throughout the semester.

The strength of this approach is that the student can “taste” Bible reading right in class, without it feeling like another academic assignment. The student is given time to try out these methods, and to see his classmates experimenting with these methods as well. The weakness is that, without continuous prodding by the teacher, the sheet of 99 chapters is quickly put to the side and lost, because of the busy-ness of high school life.

For future teaching, I plan to keep the Bible-reading lessons for use in class the same. Instead of giving them just one sheet to use for the entire year, I plan to also include portions of that list at the end of each doctrine lesson. This would remind me to encourage them, and would remind the student to continue to read the Bible in a devotional way. I may assign students to report to the class on what they found while reading the Bible – bi-weekly reports in class on different chapters of the Bible may encourage others to read, and may increase accountability. I may also ask them to write 3 questions that this chapter of the Bible answers. Finally, I plan to teach this lesson in the context of the problem, “I don’t read the Bible – it’s hard to focus.”

Unit Two: The First Article

Trinity. We look at some common diagrams and illustrations of the Trinity, and discuss how they are helpful, but ultimately fall short of teaching us everything we want to know about the Trinity. We look at the key passages that describe the Trinity, and talk about how human reason often gets in the way of understanding the Trinity. A video clip of a Muslim denying the Trinity because “the math doesn’t add up” drives home the point.

The strength of this is that it’s very clear, very simple, and applies the doctrine to the problem of human reason. Pictures and diagrams help the student to see this doctrine in his mind. The weakness of this approach is that it may be too simplistic – the students already know this doctrine and aren’t struggling with it.

For teaching this in the future, I plan to use the context, “I used to be a Christian. But the more I studied, the more I realized that none of it makes sense. It’s not logical.” We’ll use this doctrine as an example, and talk about how other religions appeal so much more to human logic. I’ll let the students come up with other aspects of Christianity that irritate our human reason. The final main point will be that our human reason is useful, but must subject itself to the Word when it doesn’t understand something. The Trinity will be taught, but in the context of this other problem.

Creation. We look at Genesis chapter 1, and take note of how the creation account is not compatible with the theory of evolution. We also take note of how the doctrine of creation flows throughout the entire Bible, and how even well-known scientists acknowledged the existence of a creator.

The strength of this approach is that everything is very clear and easy to understand – here is what we believe, and why. The weakness of this approach is that it doesn't dig any deeper than what the student learned in Old Testament class 2 years earlier – that God created the world in 6 days.

For future lessons, I plan to teach this section within the context of someone who says, "I'm a Christian and I believe in evolution." We'll not only look at the doctrine of creation and all the ways that it's incompatible with evolution. We'll also look at WHY people like evolution so much, the danger of believing a false doctrine and how it could eventually destroy your faith in Christ, and whether or not creation should be taught in the public schools.

We'll also look at the error of Christians who have set out to PROVE that God created the world. Ultimately, I hope to drive home the point that you can't PROVE creation. You can point to things that indicate that "pure chance" is an illogical way of explaining the complexity of the world (a video clip I show does that well). Ultimately, one must believe in creation as an article of faith (Hebrews 11:3), as opposed to an article of proof.

Angels and Demons. Three student groups did presentations that looked at this topic from different angles. Group 1 looked at common myths about angels, especially the origin and power of the Devil. Group 2 looked at some of the Devil's schemes for getting Christians to fall (divination and astrology, common temptations). Group 3 looked at "good angels."

The strength of this approach was that it was student-based rather than teacher based. The students who were watching and listening paid close attention as their classmates presented the information. The weakness was that the audience was very passive – everyone could just relax, watch the show, and let the teacher summarize things at the end. Also, this topic didn't lend itself well to addressing the life and problems of the teenagers in the classroom. It had a more theoretical feel than what I would have liked.

In the future, I might try to approach this topic with the idea that "we are not alone" or "learning about creatures from another world" or something of that nature. The main problem that I still have to "flesh out" is that teenagers are very much concerned with "the here and now" - what they can see and feel and touch and hear *right now*. "This stuff about angels doesn't matter." But look at what's happening right now – these creatures from another world are "fighting over you" – the Devil and his evil angels have set out to destroy you (references to movies where invaders from another planet want to destroy the earth). And the good angels commissioned by God have set out to protect you. Law and Gospel applications, along with real-life high school applications (possible angel-explanations to what happens in my life) might be a way of livening up this doctrine of the Bible.

This might also be a good time to bring up the idea of how our society likes to talk about angels, but doesn't like to talk about the One who sends his angels. Losing sight of the real source of power behind angels, and the ultimate goal of angels (taking care of Christians as they walk to heaven) are lost in our culture. Belief in angels is just a superstition with a Christian flavor, for many people. Highlighting that aspect of our culture might be necessary and useful. This

approach could work well: “I am spiritual. I believe in angels.” (But not in the Devil. Not in Jesus. Etc.)

Providence. We introduce the idea of a loved one dying in a car accident. “Why did God let this bad thing happen to good people?” is the approach I’ve taken on this subject. We start out by looking at some mistaken reactions to bad things happening (“God must be punishing me”) and look at the promises God gives in Romans chapter 8. We conclude with a class presentation on “Seven Reasons Why God Lets Bad Things Happen.”

The strength of this approach is that it puts everything into the context of real life problems. Students can get emotionally involved if they are experiencing something bad in their lives. There are a number of weaknesses here – the student presentation leaves most of the class passively listening, and often not paying attention, to the most important lessons that can be learned – why God lets bad things happen. Another weakness is that the student isn’t given enough time to think about his OWN life – what “bad things” have happened to him and why.

For future teaching, I plan to lessen the size of the class presentation, so that all of the students can participate in this lesson. I plan to give the students more time to think about their own lives and what has happened to them. They will have a chance to listen to classmates’ problems, compare them to their own, and then explore different Biblical explanations to the “why” of their problems. Students will be required to explain each of “The Seven Reasons” and connect all of them to the problems they’ve experienced in life. The approach will continue to be “Why did God let this happen to me?” but with more student involvement.

On possible insertion that might fit well here would be the **theology of the cross vs. the theology of glory**. More is written about this later in this paper, under “The Third Article – Sanctification.”

Predestination. In the past, I’ve taught this doctrine right at the end of the First Article and before the Second Article. The logic behind this is that God had a plan to save us, before we sinned, and before he set the plan into motion (sending his Son). I’m not sure if this is the correct place to teach that doctrine. I’ve toyed with the idea of teaching it right before conversion. The current look at this doctrine uses Ephesians 1:3-14. We read those verses and highlight the different aspects of predestination. We consider the “Why” question and focus on the concept of God’s grace. We also take a brief look at the false doctrine of double predestination.

The strength of this is the simple way this difficult doctrine is taught. The focus is not just on “what is this doctrine” but also the look at the “why” – God’s grace. The weakness of this approach is that it doesn’t apply as clearly and directly to teen life as I would like. The nature of this lesson lends itself more to passive learning by the student, instead of more student involvement and active learning.

For future lessons, I plan to approach this lesson with the problem, “God doesn’t love me – I’m not good enough for him. I’ll never be good enough for him.” We’ll look at how people say that sometimes when they have parents who have high expectations. We’ll look at how people have

looked at God that way (Luther) and how this doctrine really addresses the idea of God's grace. "Grace Alone," one of the three "sola's" will be highlighted here. We'll let each student "tell his story" in the form of an essay, of how God worked it out that he or she is a Christian today. We'll look for earthly evidence of God's love, and then refocus the student on the Word – the most reliable "evidence" that God loves you – the words of God themselves. The ultimate expression of God's grace is the cross of Jesus Christ.

Prayer. I've already mentioned some things in connection to prayer earlier in this paper, on page 22, under "Incorporating Prayer." For the most recent course, a short lesson on prayer appears here because of its connection to the idea of providence – God answers our prayers as he takes care of us. I plan on moving this topic up, and moving predestination down to the last thing taught before the second article in future semesters. In this lesson we review the concepts that God promises to answer our prayers, that God helps us pray, and that our own sinfulness gets in the way of our prayers. We are reminded of what to pray for, look at some models of prayer, and look at Jesus' promises connected to prayer. Students are required to write a prayer and "try it out" in class (privately praying in silence the prayer they wrote.)

The strength of this lesson is that it connects logically to everything else around it. They get to do something practical – write a prayer. They try it out in class. The weakness is that the lesson is shallow – the students have heard these things many times.

For future classes, I would like to teach this lesson within the context of the problem, "I hardly ever pray. Whenever I try, I don't know what to say." Students try to brainstorm the ingredients for the ideal prayer. They still write their own "ultimate prayer" along with a prayer that addresses a certain topic (as listed in the Lutheran Prayer Book). They hand those in, and I read those, along with the one written in the book, to start out class a few times per week. Perhaps students will be required to write prayers that reflect certain doctrines of the Bible.

Stewardship. I have included this lesson because of the connection to providence. Since I trust that God will take care of my needs, I will not hesitate to respond by giving my offerings to him. Other places within this course where this lesson might work would be in the Third Article, when talking about Church and Worship. However, I have included this lesson here because it is earlier in the semester. Students are giving mission offerings throughout the semester, and this lesson might serve as a needed "boost" to students who are struggling in their stewardship and giving. The lesson looks at key stewardship passages scattered throughout the Bible, and then focuses especially on 2 Corinthians 9. At the end of the lesson, the student evaluates his own spending habits and decides how much he will give in the future. There is also a reading assignment from the "Prepared to Answer" series connected to this lesson.

The strength of this lesson is that it keeps the student focused on the Word – passages from the Bible and the section from 2 Corinthians 9 are heavily emphasized. The weakness might be the passive nature – the students listen to the teacher present these Bible passages. I wasn't very clear in my connection to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the number one motivator for my Christian giving. Too much emphasis may have been placed on the idea, "I'll give because I trust God will take care of me."

In the future, I would like the students to look at this doctrine within the context of the problem, “I don’t give an offering because I won’t have enough to pay for the things I need.” Students will be assigned passages that are the basis for their response to this objection. The students together will address how to respond, based on the passages of the Bible (rather than me just presenting it.)

Unit Three: The Second Article

The Fall into Sin, and Original Sin. Before we get into the person and work of Jesus Christ, we discuss the problem of sin. We take a quick look at the fall, and how that resulted in the loss of the image of God. We look at original sin, and the sinful nature that we all have. We read Romans 7 which talks about the battle that takes place between the Old Adam and the New Man. Student presentations teach original sin and the sinful nature.

The strength of this approach is that students are presenting this information to their classmates, raising the attention level of their classmates. A number of pictures are used that come out of the language of the Bible – the DEADness of our natural spiritual self, the CRAVINGS of our sinful nature, how we are objects of God’s WRATH, how an unborn baby is sinful, how we are HOSTILE toward God, etc. These visual words help the student to better picture the sinful nature.

The weakness of this approach is that I haven’t applied this to high school life and problems as closely as I ought. I did look at the question, “How could you do such a thing?” which is asked when a Christian student does something bad. But I wonder if all I did was make the student feel more “at ease” with some of the sins he has committed.

For future lessons, I would like to teach this lesson while thinking about the comment, “I’m a good Christian.” The idea here is that we all would like to believe that we are “good Christians.” After all, look at our lives. But this statement might reveal a forgetfulness of our original sin and sinful nature – too much sinful pride. This lesson could serve to address the sinful pride that we have, and perhaps the comfortableness we might have with our own sinfulness (justifying it, etc.). Understanding my weakness as someone with sin will motivate me to look more to God for forgiveness and strength.

Kinds of Sin. This lesson looks at the various ways that the sinful nature expresses itself in our lives – original vs. actual sin, mental / invisible sins, sins of omission and commission, voluntary and involuntary sins, the Catholic distinction of mortal vs. venial sins, and the unforgivable sin. This was presented as a class presentation.

The strength of this approach was that the class presenters were required to make high school examples of all these different sorts of sins. They did a good job. But the weakness is that the students in the audience could be passive listeners. There wasn’t as much of a group-effort going on here, to think about the sins we commit every day. There was a disconnect to the lives of the students here – it felt more theoretical than it should have, even with student presenters doing the applying.

For future planning, I will be minimizing the class presentation of this topic. Perhaps students will be asked to describe one or two of these kinds of sins, but not all of them. I plan to approach this topic by looking at the comment, "What if I have no sins to confess to God?" (Keying off the idea that we may not always be aware of all the sins we commit on a daily basis.) I will be asking the students to find examples from Bible stories of these kinds of sins. Find examples in the hallways of Lakeside! And find examples in their own personal lives! The main point is that as we are more aware of our own sinfulness, we are also more appreciative of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

The Justice of God. The main point of this lesson is that God, as a just judge, must respond to our sin with punishment for the crime. Passages are highlighted which remind us that God promises to punish sin. Passages are also highlighted that remind us that God is a loving and forgiving God. This seeming contradiction is solved at the cross of Jesus, where God carries out his punishment so that he can also carry out his grace. This was a student project last semester.

The strength of this approach is that it presents to the students very clearly the two sides of God – his law and gospel, his justice and grace. The weakness to this approach is that it feels very theoretical – it doesn't really connect well to all the ups and downs in the life of the teenager sitting in the desk. The student presentation made this a very passive learning experience for most of the students.

For future classes, I plan to add a number of aspects to this topic. My general approach will be "How can a loving God send people to such a horrible hell?" We'll look at the doctrine of hell and how that might cause a person to fear God, to hate him, or to run away from him. We'll talk about how God must punish sin because of his justice. We'll also look at how God is loving by providing a "way out" of hell – his Son, Jesus Christ. A nice side topic might be the idea of "revenge" – "people don't get what they deserve." Sometimes teenagers struggle with feelings of injustice, and the lesson here is to trust that God will carry out his justice in his due time. And if God wants to show grace to a sinner, he can do that as well.

Jesus – Human and Divine.

This lesson briefly reviews the person of Jesus Christ as true man and God by highlighting different passages from the New Testament. It also touches on the common view that Jesus is just a man, and nothing more. An excellent article in the "More Prepared to Answer" series is assigned.

The strength of this lesson is that it's very simple and straight to the point – you cannot miss the idea that Jesus is truly divine. The weakness of this lesson is that it might be too simple – the students already know this – so how does it apply to them?

For future teaching, I would like to teach this entire lesson in the context of the statement, "I respect Jesus just like you. He was the best teacher that ever lived." We'll look at that in light of the Bible, and how it falls short of what the Bible really teaches about Jesus Christ. We'll talk about ways of witnessing to a person who says those sorts of things.

Jesus – His Humiliation. This lesson reviews the basic steps of Jesus’ humiliation, and then highlights the “invisible” suffering that Jesus did for us on the cross (separation from God). Video clips from the video “Gospel of John” are shown which reminds the students of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The strength of this lesson is the video clip – students are reminded that Jesus died for their sins. The weakness is that the student already knows this – how does this apply to his teenage life and problems right now?

For future teaching, I would like to look at this lesson in the context of the statement, “I watched the Passion of the Christ and was moved by all the suffering that Jesus did – that really affected me!” The idea here would be to help the student see that many people miss the most important aspect of Christ’s suffering – that he was rejected by his Heavenly Father, that he became a curse for us. Witnessing to others will be highlighted again here.

Jesus – His Exaltation. This lesson reviews the basic steps of Jesus’ exaltation, and highlights the resurrection. Passages that remind us WHY Jesus rose are looked at. Myths about the resurrection (a class presentation) are looked at. An article from “More Prepared to Answer” is also read and discussed. A video clip of Jesus’ resurrection as portrayed in the “Gospel of John” video is watched.

The strength of this lesson is probably the visual aid of the video clip. The weakness, obviously, is that this lesson repeats what the student has already been taught many times and already believes. Applications to the teenagers’ lives, right now, can be difficult, sometimes.

For future lessons, I’d like to focus on an unbeliever’s look at Easter: “What a strange holiday – I don’t get it.” We’ll look at the secular celebration of Easter. We’ll look at the myths, once again (perhaps each myth will be a mini-presentation). We’ll watch a video clip that talks about the resurrection, and why we can believe it. I would also like to segway into the idea that “sometimes Christians don’t ‘get it’ either (the reason Jesus rose from the dead).” I can emphasize to the student that the resurrection of Jesus is PROOF that Jesus is who he said he is. PROOF that sins are forgiven. And PROOF that someday that student will rise from the dead. This might be a way for me to have the student understand “Why does the resurrection matter to me, right now?”

I am also considering using this as a springboard to talk about Judgment Day, and our own resurrections. That doctrine of the Bible is highlighted in 1 Corinthians 15. Although we cover it later in eschatology, it seems unfortunate to me that we never really get to talk about it in too much detail because of the rush of the end of the year. This might be a good time to bring it into the class.

Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King. This topic shifts our focus from looking at the events of Jesus’ work to applying those events to our lives today. The idea that Jesus is our prophet, priest, and king has already been taught to most of our students. The challenge here is to see how Jesus is all three of those right now, in the life of a teenager who is going through ups and downs in high school. The topic looks at the basic Bible passages that emphasize Jesus as

prophet, priest, and king, and asks the question, “How is he STILL carrying out his role as prophet today?”

The strength of this approach is that it takes time to apply the person and work of Jesus Christ to the teen student. The weakness is that it seems to fall short of really trying to apply this to what is happening in the life of a teenager. Creating real-life situations that help the student visualize Jesus carrying out these roles are missing. The students seem to drift during this lesson, and consider it “just a review” of what they already learned in confirmation class.

In the future, I would like to approach this topic while considering the question, “Jesus is someone I believe in. But it’s hard to see how he helps me right now with my problems today.” We’ll create a real-life situation where Jesus as prophet, priest, and king come to life. As we consider the idea of “Jesus as King,” this might be a good time to bring up the idea of Jesus’ control over governments, and what is our role as citizens. With the election coming up, the idea of Christian citizenship, and the Christian as a member of two kingdoms (the temporary earthly kingdom and the eternal kingdom of heaven) would be a good application.

Salvation Terms – Justification, Redemption, and Reconciliation. We close our look at the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed by looking at these 3 terms. The most emphasis is placed on “justification.” This lesson is very “kinesthetic” – a number of students are chosen as “volunteers” to act out a court scene. Part 1 of the lesson focuses on a person trying to justify himself with his own good works in God’s courtroom, and how that doesn’t work out. Part 2 of the lesson focuses on a person trusting in the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, and how that person is declared “not guilty” in God’s court of law. The students pay attention very closely to this lesson, and seem to retain just about everything we talk about.

We also look at redemption and reconciliation. Redemption is looked at within the context of “self-worth” – we are worth a great deal because God paid a great price for us – the life of his Son, Jesus Christ. The students seemed to listen when talking about feelings of worthlessness, but this lesson definitely needs to be revised so as to make the idea of “redemption” more memorable. “Reconciliation” is also discussed, but the application to a student’s life isn’t as clear as I would like it to be.

The strength of this lesson is that it’s very active (the justification part), and very memorable. The students seem to have fun “performing” and watching this lesson. The weakness is that I need to improve the student handout, so that we can better apply this doctrine of justification to some different issues, such as justification by works, what happens on Judgment Day (the idea of judgment is there because we’re in God’s courtroom), etc. I also need to consider the idea of “justification” in the life of a teenager – how does that have meaning and comfort to that teen student today? Another weakness to this section of the course is that the other two terms, redemption and reconciliation, aren’t presented in a very lively or memorable way. It seems that I “pull out all the stops” on justification and then just “get through” the other two terms. I need to focus more of my energies on bringing to life those other two terms.

For future lessons, I would like to expand the student handout so as to bring in more applications for the doctrine of justification. I could have them attempt to write a definition of “justification.”

During the presentation, I could focus on the GRACE of the judge, along with the FAITH of the defendant. I can really clarify the idea of justification BY FAITH alone, one of the 3 sola's of the Lutheran church. This term could be taught within the context of "I'm not sure what will happen to me on Judgment Day," and how we CAN be sure.

I would also like to consider ways to teach the other two terms in a more "application-focused," "student-based" way (instead of me just standing their teaching). Redemption could be taught more in the context of self-worth, with the ideas of "being bought" and "being an heir" really explored. "I feel worthless" could be the context within which this term is taught. Reconciliation could be taught within the context of the thought, "God hates me." The peace between God and man that Jesus brings could be emphasized more here. The entire lesson on "salvation terms" could be taught within the context of "I feel uncomfortable as I think about God," and then I can approach that problem from three different angles, looking at each term. As I revise those notes, I pray that God would give me guidance in that direction.

Unit Four: The Third Article.

By the time we get to this section of the doctrine class, we are about three-fourths of the way through the semester. The students are starting to get "antsy" and a little "tired" of sitting in the classroom and going to school. Holding their attention and drawing out good class discussion is getting more and more difficult. Moving quickly from topic to topic, making sure to apply the doctrines to the current lives of the students, and keeping the students active is more important now as the semester comes to a close.

The Holy Spirit. Here we look at the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We do it in the context of the student's identity – "Who am I?" We talk about identity crises for teenagers, and how each of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We then answer questions about our identity – Who is this Holy Spirit that lives within me? We look at key passages. When did this happen? We move to the doctrine of conversion. If that's who I am, what happens now? We move to the doctrine of sanctification.

The strength of this approach is that we aren't just teaching dry facts about the Holy Spirit, conversion, and sanctification. The weakness of this approach, as we discuss the Holy Spirit, is that it's a little too passive – the student just sits there while we go through key passages about the Holy Spirit. The student already believes the basics about the Holy Spirit anyway, and really doesn't learn anything new.

For future lessons on the Holy Spirit, perhaps it would be good to focus on the idea that the Spirit is an incredibly powerful being (He's God after all) that is working within and around the student. Perhaps the "malady" we can address would be the idea of "underestimating the Holy Spirit." "Who am I?" can continue to be the context of teaching about the Spirit – that we are temples of the third person of the Trinity. As the student considers that question, I can point out that we sometimes underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do within us and through us. "Is it in you?" (the latest Gatorade theme) can be brought in as an illustration. Better choices of Bible passages highlighting ordinary people doing extraordinary things (the Spirit working through them) can be a part of my student-handouts.

Conversion / My Baptism. In the most recent course, we segued to this topic by asking the question, “When did I become a temple of the Holy Spirit?” We looked at the doctrine of conversion within the context of decision theology: “Everyone says that I must make a decision to accept Jesus into my heart. Is that right?” We look at the 3 pictures of conversion (rebirth, raised from the dead, the blind receiving sight) and consider how those pictures help us to understand that conversion is ALL the work of the Holy Spirit as we, spiritually dead and blind creatures, are passive. A student presentation on those 3 pictures was the centerpiece of our look at this doctrine of the Bible.

The strength of this approach was that we kept this doctrine in the context of solving a mystery – do we choose to be a Christian or not? How does it work? It was visual – looking at the 3 pictures of conversion. It was student-based – a team of students looked at those 3 pictures and gave a presentation. The weakness of this approach is that it wasn’t as student-based as one might think. The rest of the class was able to passively sit back and watch the presentation – they weren’t challenged to think about this question as much as I would have liked. I didn’t follow through on the application to the very end of the lesson – I didn’t have a section that said, “Now that I know this, what do I say to someone who tells me that I need to make a choice before I’m really a Christian?” I missed that point.

Also, looking back on the course, I believe that this is probably the best opportunity to talk about “Remembering My Baptism.” As Lutherans, we want to do that. It really is an “identity issue” – remembering that I have been washed in the waters of baptism on a daily basis – that’s who I am. It fits into the rest of the section that has an “identity theme” – who am I? Wondering if my baptism was really valid many years ago when it is called into question today by a believer in decision theology would be a good reason to include a look at baptism in the conversion section of this course. We’d have to look at baptism again under the “means of grace” section. But not including it here might be “missing the boat.”

For future lessons on conversion, I would like to really work on the idea of “identity” here – “Are you really a Christian? You didn’t make a decision for Jesus Christ!” We would keep looking at the three pictures of conversion, and address that issue. We would include a look at baptism here, within the context of the false notion, “Are you really a Christian? Your baptism doesn’t mean anything.” We can look at the power and meaning of baptism. Here is where we can include the idea of “remembering our baptisms” as a way of remembering who we are on a daily basis.

Sanctification. In this lesson, we look at the doctrine of sanctification within the context of “Christian goal-setting – who I want to be as a Christian.” We look at the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5) and the definitions of love (1 Corinthians 13) and discuss how these are the ways we can give glory to God and express our Christian love to each other in this world. We also look at Romans 12 and consider what spiritual gifts God may have placed inside of us so that we might be of service to others. The students hear short presentations by their classmates on those words from the Bible, and then write an essay that highlights three “aspects” of sanctification that they would like to focus on in their lives.

The strength of this lesson is that we place this doctrine into the context of real-life for the teenage student. They're thinking about the future at this point – the school year is almost finished, and their senior year is coming up. “Where will I go to college and what will my career someday be?” are questions on their minds. Connecting sanctification to those thoughts seems to hold their attention better than simply defining sanctification and lecturing on how it follows justification. They're forced to reflect, to apply, and to think ahead about their lives of sanctification.

The weakness of this lesson is that I haven't fully connected the idea of Christian goal-setting to “earthly goal-setting.” It seemed to me that we started going in that direction, but never fully made the connection. The students were also too passive as we considered all the fruits of the Spirit and the definitions of love from 1 Corinthians 13.

In the future, I would like to really “flesh out” the context of Christian identity here, within the context of this teenage problem: “Who do I want to be someday? I don't know!!” I would respond – “Yes you do – your earthly goals (college, career, family) might be ‘foggy.’ – but spiritually speaking you can already know right now who you want to be – let's see.” We would then look at Galatians 5 and 1 Corinthians 13, with students giving definitions and examples for those words. Following that, each student would be required to write a one-page essay on what they had heard from their classmates and connect what they had heard to their earthly goals – “My goal is patience. Patience as a senior in high school, as a student at this college, as a person in this career, etc.” I still need to better plan that out, but there is much room for improvement there.

One possible insertion here would be to look at the **doctrine of vocation**. In whatever place in life we find ourselves (a specific career, a husband or father, etc.), we can glorify our Savior and find spiritual fulfillment as we carry out the responsibilities that God has given to us in this world. One career to especially highlight here would be the vocation of public ministry. I do believe I need to place more emphasis on that in this course, and I will be looking for creative ways to do that (guest speakers, etc.) in the months ahead.

Another possible insertion might be the **theology of the cross vs. the theology of glory**. As the young person looks ahead to the future and strives to glorify God, there is no promise that his or her earthly life will be simple and easy. “Crosses” are in the future for every Christian, and it is good to be prepared for it. Another possible insertion for the theology of the cross is under “providence,” since we are talking about the troubles that come the way of the Christian.

The Means of Grace – Baptism. In the most recent course, we look at what a “means of grace” is, and how baptism is a means of grace. We look at baptism within the context of infant baptism – someone doesn't believe in infant baptism, and you are challenged to think about why you do believe in infant baptism, and how you would communicate that to someone else. A class presentation that looks at the key passages on baptism is the centerpiece of this lesson. The lesson on infant baptism flows into the passages that describe faith – specifically, the faith of young children and infants, as is highlighted in the Bible. It concludes by looking at passages that describe the power of the Holy Spirit, who “blows where he pleases” and is able to create faith in anyone he wishes, infant or adult.

The strength of this lesson is that it puts the doctrine of baptism into the context of a problem that needs to be solved – why do you believe in baptizing babies? The question is answered from different angles – from “what is baptism?” to “what is faith?” to “can infants have faith?” to “how powerful is the Holy Spirit?” The class presentation puts students in the position of studying this doctrine for themselves, and students are able to listen to someone besides the teacher talk about this subject.

The weakness of this lesson is that it ends up being very passive, on the part of the students. They are able to sit and watch the class presentation. They aren’t challenged enough to dig more deeply into Scripture to help them understand what they believe and why. The lesson is also too long – the list of passages on baptism is almost exhaustive. The question “what is faith” could be looked at in greater detail and expanded upon – by the time we get to that point, everyone is “tired out” from looking at all the passages on baptism.

For future lessons, I’ve already suggested, under “conversion,” to subtract a number of passages on baptism and just focus on our own baptisms, and how they were legitimate, even when we were infants. In this way, the subject of infant baptism has already been covered, to some degree under the doctrine of conversion. We can still look at baptism from a slightly different angle – talking to someone who doesn’t believe in infant baptism. The main “problem to solve” will still be, “Why doesn’t anyone baptize babies anymore?” but we can do that more quickly. We can move quickly to passages that talk about the “universal mandate” Jesus gives for baptism, and shift quickly into the question of “what is faith?” That will be more the focus of this lesson. There will be less emphasis on the class presentation because I will be asking students to team up with each other and focus on the issues at hand by looking at the Bible passages together.

The Means of Grace – Holy Communion. In the most recent course, we looked at the Lord’s Supper within the context of close communion – why do we believe it, and how can we explain it to others? We reviewed what Holy Communion is – real presence. We looked at the blessings of Holy Communion. And finally, we looked at the passages that talked about the reasons for close communion. We concluded the lesson by discussing how we could explain this to a friend who visits our church with us. A class presentation looks at about half of the content of this lesson.

The strength of this lesson is that it looks at the doctrine in the context of solving a problem. Class presenters wrestle with this doctrine, and think about close communion. We carry that idea of “explaining this to a friend” throughout the whole lesson, making the lesson more “real” to the teenager. The weakness of this lesson is that the students are still too passive. This time of the semester, especially, the students seem to be in “shut-down-mode” as they start counting down the days to either Christmas or summer break. Sometimes the main points of the day were kept only at a confirmation-class-level, instead of digging deeper, because the students were resisting, and the teacher “just wanted to get the lesson done.”

For future lessons, I would like to continue to look at that question about close communion. But I would like to shift the main emphasis of the lesson away from that question to another problem: “I hardly ever take communion. I don’t think it really matters. You can be a Christian without

it.” I’d like the lesson to focus more on the wonderful blessings God gives to us in this sacrament, and how those blessings motivate us to attend the Lord’s Supper more frequently and regularly. I believe that this is more of a real-life problem for the high school student – struggling with motivation to attend church and take communion – this is what the student struggles with, more so than, “How do I explain to my friends close communion?” We’ll still cover that issue, but not have it be the “centerpiece” of this lesson. There will still be a section that looks at that, but even then, we’ll focus on how this (explaining close communion) can be a blessing as well, an opportunity to share our faith with someone else.

The Church – The Invisible and Visible Church. In this lesson, we look at a few myths about the Christian church that outsiders might have as they consider Christianity. We look at passages that remind us that the Invisible Church is the body of Christ, and that visible churches are different. We take a quick look at different denominations – not so much in what they teach, but more so in how there could be Christians scattered throughout different denominations because the Holy Spirit is present wherever the Word is present. We also look at the blessings of having fellowship with a visible group of Christians, blessings that come to us, and blessings that come through us to others. The class is generally taught lecture method, with questions interspersed throughout the lecture.

The strength of this approach is that it addresses the false notion that “only WELS people go to heaven.” The weakness to this approach is that there is no “real-life” context here for the student – nothing is new here, to make the student think, “Ah, this helps me right now!” I wonder if the students don’t pay too much attention to this lesson because there are no “teen issues” that are brought out by me as I teach this doctrine.

For future lessons, I’d like to put this, and the next lesson on “church fellowship,” into the context of “church shopping – I’m looking for a church to attend.” We’d look at the subject of “church” from that angle. This would be a good spot for me to insert the doctrine of the “means of grace as the only means the Holy Spirit uses to create and strengthen faith.” We can consider how many people today look elsewhere for spiritual strength and direction, rather than God’s Word and sacraments. We can also look at the related doctrine of “preservation of faith,” and how nominal church membership doesn’t preserve faith and assure eternal life. Only faith in Christ, as it is strengthened by the Holy Spirit, will get a person into heaven. These two “add-ins” fit well into the “church shopping” context – why we want to gather with other Christians. I’ll find other ways for students to participate, as opposed to having a lengthy class presentation that everyone can passively sit and listen to. The lesson flows naturally into the next lesson...

Church Fellowship and False Doctrine. We will have already covered the positive aspect of church fellowship in the previous lesson. What follows answers the question, “What do I do when confronted with false doctrine?” The most previous course addressed the myth of “it’s not a big deal.” We also looked at passages that encouraged us to “speak the truth in love,” and to “keep away” when necessary. We addressed the notion that “this isn’t loving!” with a number of passages that point out how this actually is a loving thing to do for a number of reasons.

The strength of this approach is that everything is taught in a way that puts the doctrine into the context of a real-life situation. The weakness is that it’s very “teacher-based” allowing the

student to be more passive than what is good for this time of the year. Some real-life applications are made with a student handout, but they all seem to be a little too simplistic – not difficult enough to challenge the student at the end of the school year.

For future lessons, I would like to put this more into the idea of being a “confessional Christian.” We’ll look at how many Christians today aren’t confessional – it’s just too much hassle and effort. We’ll look at how the Bible encourages us to be confessional, both as individuals and as a body of Christians. We’ll take the same look at some of the problems addressed in previous lessons, but with a greater encouragement to be someone who doesn’t just know the truth, but speaks the truth, and does it in a loving way.

Eschatology – End of Life, and End of the World. In previous semesters, we have always run out of time before we are able to discuss this lesson. In place of a regular class discussion on these topics, I assign to each student a “project” that looks at eschatology. They are given 30-35 statements that are either common myths, or just untrue statements, about the end of the world. At the end of each statement, a Bible reference is listed. The student is required to look up the Bible reference, read it, find the truth in that reference, copy it down, and summarize it in his own words. In place of a regular semester exam, the student brings his completed project with him. I check it, and then we go through it, almost “confirmation-examination-style.” As I ask the students these questions, they are invited to ask questions as they occur to them. We’ve had some classes (quieter ones) where we spend the entire semester exam period just going through the lesson. We’ve had other classes (more vocal groups) take the semester exam period into a different direction – very good questions are asked related to eschatology. We discuss those questions, and I collect and correct the work they did in connection with the passages.

The strength of this approach is that the student still learns/reviews the main points of eschatology, but not in the context of the classroom. The student is spending a great deal of time looking at the Bible (it takes about 6 hours for most students), and summarizing the truths that the Bible states. False doctrines about eschatology are clearly “debunked” by the student himself as he studies what the Bible says. With the semester coming to a close, this forces the student to still learn something, but without the monotony of listening to a teacher in a classroom. The weakness of this approach is that it doesn’t always encourage more free class discussion. Quieter classes don’t bring up good questions related to eschatology. Some groups of students might find this approach to be “too limiting.” Also, I’m not able to cover some of the common false doctrines in our society as clearly as I would like (millennialism, for example).

For future courses, I would like to keep this approach generally the same. I plan to tweak future courses so that I cover some eschatological topics earlier in the semester, under other doctrines (final judgment would fit under justification, our resurrection could fit after Jesus’ resurrection, etc.). I might be able to even mention some eschatological false doctrines under other doctrines in this course. This entire lesson could be taught within the context, “I’m not sure what happens to me when I die.” I especially would like to add to the handout a place where the student is required to come up with a really-well-thought-out discussion question related to death or judgment day. This might “prime the pump” for discussion and cause some of our students to feel “less limited” by this approach.

Omissions in this course: There are some notable doctrines that aren't covered in this course because they are taught in other courses at Lakeside. The roles of men and women are discussed in great detail during the senior year within the context of a "family life" type of religion course. The antichrist is covered in the other junior religion course that looks at church history. That church history course also takes a closer look at other religions and denominations as they come up chronologically in history. I don't spend too much time relating certain doctrines to Bible stories, because the students just recently had those Bible stories during the freshmen and sophomore religion courses. We still make mention of some of them, but it's not emphasized very much. I've also learned to check in with other teachers before I use a visual aid (video clips) because it may have already been used in a previous course. This would explain my omission of many good video clips that would fit well with the doctrines we are discussing.

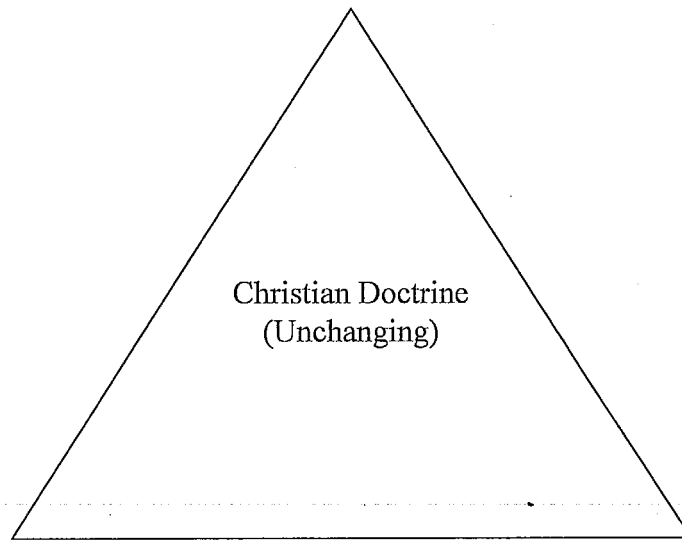
One doctrine that has been omitted that perhaps should not be is the doctrine of "Christian Freedom" or "Adiaphoron." This was brought to my attention by one of the WLS professors who evaluated this paper. As I pondered his suggestion to add that to this course, I can see all kind of good reasons to do so. Over the last few years here, I have noticed that students like to (at times) assert their freedom and rights. Students can forget that their words and actions, while not technically "forbidden" in the Bible, can still have an adverse affect on their fellow Christians. I can envision a "What do we do with Adiaphora" section of the doctrine class. The ultimate goal of that lesson would be to raise the students sensitivity toward their fellow Christians, so that they would be more ready to show Christian love by refraining from certain words and actions if it hurts another person spiritually. I have much to "brainstorm" on this one, but I can already see a number of good class discussions flowing out of this. I plan to experiment with this idea in the semesters ahead.

V. Concluding thoughts: relating this course to the overall theme or "thesis" –

It is necessary for the religion teacher to be constantly rethinking, changing, and adjusting his methodologies of teaching God's Word as he seeks to help each student grow in faith and in the knowledge of God's grace.

While writing this paper and looking at my doctrine course, I came up with a diagram that helps me as I attempt to teach doctrine in my high school setting....

Real-Life Applications (Questions, discussion, etc.) – Always Changing



Methods –
Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic – Always changing

Active learning vs.
passive learning –
Always changing

The idea here is that Christian Doctrine – the Word of God – doesn't change. But as we present this message to others, we are always being forced to change. At the top of the triangle are the "Real-Life Applications." These will always be changing, from year to year, and from class to class. In my future revisions of the doctrine course, as listed above, I'm changing many of my "teenage problems to solve" as I teach various doctrines from the Bible.

On the bottom, left corner of the triangle are the "methods." As mentioned under the heading, "What I've learned about students," each student has different needs – the need to visualize what is being taught, the need to hear and speak what is being taught (auditory), and the need to move around, and not always be still (kinesthetic). But each student's needs are different. Each class is different. And as a teacher grows in understanding how to teach in these different ways, he or she is becoming "different" too, from year to year. These things are always changing.

The bottom, right corner of the triangle highlights "active vs. passive learning." This is also related to teaching methods, which is why it's on the same line. Once again, each student and each class of students bring their own needs for active or passive learning. Some classes need more involvement, and some less. And once again, the teacher is always changing in this way as well – learning more and more about how to engage the students in a constructive class discussion vs. just lecturing them on a certain topic. There is definitely a "learning curve" for the teacher in that regard, and I'm very sure that I have a long ways to go in improving my ability to get the students involved in active learning vs. passive learning.

For a teacher, I believe it's good to keep those three things on his mind. As I approach each doctrine of the Bible, I need first of all to understand "what is it?" That will never change – it's

the centerpiece of the class. The next step is “how to apply it?” which is why it’s at the top of the triangle, and this is always changing. After figuring that out, the next mystery to solve is “how do I teach it?” recognizing both the visual-auditory-kinesthetic needs as well as being aware of active vs. passive learning, which is always changing as the students change and the teacher grows, along with the world in which they live.

Really, you could apply this thesis, or diagram above, to any of the different aspects of ministry covered in the “Masters of Practical Theology” program. In the area of evangelism, “sharing the Law and the Gospel with an unbeliever” would be at the center of the triangle – that doesn’t change. But how one builds bridges into the lives of unbelievers will constantly be changing. You can see this as various ministries are begun at different parishes, all with the ultimate goal of providing an opportunity to share the Gospel with unbelievers.

In the area of preaching, “authoritatively proclaiming Law and Gospel” within the context of a worship service could be at the center of the triangle – the unchanging goal of preaching. But the applications one uses, the logical approaches to the sermon (narrative vs. didactic), and the language (using “we” and “us” vs. using “you” as highlighted in the latest “Preach the Word” newsletter) will continue to change.

In the area of worship, “God speaks in Word and Sacrament and the believers respond” could be at the center of the triangle. But the lectionary one uses (use the latest revision or an old one?), the music (traditional, contemporary, or blend), the instruments, the wording of the prayers, the architecture of the building – all will change, as time goes on.

In the area of counseling, the one seminar I still need to take, I can anticipate that this thesis will also apply – the ultimate, unchanging goal of counseling is to listen to the counselee, assess the problem, and ultimately share law and gospel in a practical way that addresses the problem. But listening techniques will change. Modern symptoms of the problem of sin will change. Communication techniques on the part of the counselor will change as well.

Really, is this is the challenge of ministry – the goal of sharing Law and Gospel remains the same and does not change. But everything else is! What a joy it is for a minister to wrestle with this challenge, and to find “a way” to share God’s Word that doesn’t get in the way of the Holy Spirit doing his work. But what a daunting task, to keep up with all of these changes. Here is a very good reason why every minister needs to continue his education throughout his life – to continue to stay rooted in the unchanging Word (what’s inside the triangle), and to continue to be aware of the changing world in which he is serving (the outside of the triangle).

I don’t mean to sound negative, but I don’t think I as a minister will ever completely “get it right.” Considering this project in particular – teaching doctrine to teenagers – I will never design and teach a lesson that’s just right for everyone in the class. For some, my lesson will be too simple. For others, too deep. For some, not visual enough. For others, not active enough. My applications will “hit the target” for some, and “miss the target” for others. I’m a human being and therefore limited in what I can do. Add to that my sinfulness, and it’s a miracle that anyone can learn anything while sitting in my classroom.

And isn't this true for every aspect of ministry? We'll never get it "just right" for every worship attendee, for every evangelism prospect, for every sermon listener, for every counselee. It can be depressing, sometimes, to try to "get out of the way" of the Holy Spirit, but realizing that we'll never completely get out of his way. Our sinful human limitations will always be there.

But what a comfort it is to know that I am forgiven for all the times I've gotten in Spirit's way. Jesus paid for that sin as well. What a comfort it is to hear the promise of God, that he will work through my imperfect attempts, that he will give me strength and wisdom, and when it's all said and done, his Word "will not return to him empty, but will accomplish what I desire and will achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). What a comfort it is to know that this God and Savior, who promises all of these things, will never change, even as I and the rest of the world does: "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Motivated by these gracious promises, I will continue to work at this life-long "project" of teaching God's "never changing" Word in an ever-changing context. When I finally have it "figured out" and "get it right," I'll be sure to let everyone know. But I suspect that it might be awhile.

Sola Dei Gloria

Bibliography

What Luther Says. Compiled by Ewald Plass. CPH, St. Louis: 1959.

The Bible. NIV version. CPH, St. Louis: 1973.

Addendums

The course as taught in 2008-2009 (which tried to incorporate most of the changes mentioned on pages 37-58)

Includes student handouts and powerpoints
Still a “work in progress”!