

CORAM DEO

Bible Study Leader's Guide

These studies have been written by Rev. William Cwirla and Rev. Brent Kuhlman, plenary teachers for Coram Deo, to help pastors and other adult leaders prepare youth to attend the 2011 Higher Things conferences.

July 5-8, 2011
Las Vegas, Nevada
University of Nevada

July 12-15, 2011
Bloomington/Normal, Illinois
Illinois State University

July 19-22, 2011
Atlanta, Georgia
Emory University

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INTRODUCTION

First things first. Coram Deo? What exactly does “Coram Deo” mean? Well, it’s Latin for “before God,” as in His presence, under His reign, etc. Think a bit about living Coram Deo, before God. What does it mean that you live Coram Deo? Is this good news or bad news? Consider the question posed in Job (4:17): “Can mortal man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?” How would you answer that question?

Answers will vary. Guide the discussion along both the Law and the Gospel. Under the Law, life before God is terrifying. It is living under His judgment and wrath. But under the Gospel, life before God is beautiful, a restoration of what God intended when He made Man in the beginning. The question from Job is the core religious question: How can a sinner destined to die stand before a righteous and holy God? The Lutheran answer is: by grace through faith for Christ’s sake.

Can anyone be justified before God by his or her works? Why not? How then do we stand before God? Read Galatians 3:11.

No. Though the Law promises life, the sinner cannot comply with the Law. In fact, the Law works death even as it promises life. Sin + Law = Death (Romans 7). How then do we stand before God? Only as we are hidden in Jesus Christ through faith in Him.

Adam CORAM DEO

. . . then the
Lord God
formed
the man
of dust from
the ground
and breathed
into his nostrils
the breath
of life, and the
man became
a living
creature.

- Genesis 2:7

1. Read Genesis 1:26-31. In whose image were Adam and Eve made? What did this mean for their life before God?

Adam and Eve were made "in the image" of God. This means that they perfectly reflected God to creation, and perfectly represented creation before God. Even in their ordering with respect to each other, they reflected the Triune God. The Trinity is a hierarchy of equals, just as man is over woman – yet both are equal in dignity before God.

2. Read Genesis 2:4-25. How was Adam's life before God as priesthood? What sort of sacrifices did Adam offer to God?

Adam's priesthood was to "have dominion" over all the creation and to "subdue it." In naming all the animals, Adam exercised his priesthood, offering up the creation to the Creator. Adam's chief sacrifice was not eating of the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and eating of the Tree of Life. This not-eating and eating was Adam's "eucharistic sacrifice," his thank-offering to God for all the creation.

3. Read Genesis 3:1-24. How did Sin change Adam's life before God? Before his wife? In what ways did Adam's priesthood change on account of his disobedience? What are some signs of God's grace in Christ?

Adam became self-aware and realized he was naked. He and his wife tried to cover themselves with their own designer fig leaves, but that wouldn't work. They hid from God and accused one another. Adam now had to work by the sweat of his brow to his death. His food went from fruits and nuts to harvested plants and grain. The soil would be uncooperative. Eve would experience increased pain in childbirth and a conflicted desire for her husband and his place. In other words, Adam's priesthood was now tainted by sin and death. No longer could he stand Coram Deo on his own.

Still, God is gracious and merciful. He promises to do battle with the serpent, and from her Seed would come the decisive blow that would crush the devil's head. This is considered the first Gospel of the Bible. God also provided "skins" in place of their own self-stitched fig leaves. The implication here is blood sacrifice and the vicarious death of another creature.

4. Read Romans 5:12-21. In what sense is Adam's fall the fall of all of humanity? What entered into the world as a result of Adam's disobedience? What came into the world as a result of Jesus' obedience? What does it mean that Adam was a "type of the one who was to come"?

As "head" of humanity, Adam embodied all of mankind. When he fell, all humanity fell. "In Adam we have all been one, one huge rebellious man," (LSB #569). As a result of Adam's fall, sin and death entered the world. Jesus, the new Adam, undid what Adam had done and through His obedience as the new Man, brought justification and life.

"Type" here means that there is a connection between Adam and Jesus, as heads of humanity. The only way that humanity could be saved was by a new head, a new Priest who could offer up a pleasing sacrifice.

5. Read Romans 8:18-25. What was the effect of Adam's sin on the whole created order? When will the damage be undone? What is our stance before God as we await the redemption of our bodies?

The entire created order was thrown into decay and death. There is nothing in the whole universe that isn't affected by Adam's fall into sin.

The reversal comes in the new creation. In the meantime, we, together with the whole creation, wait in hope for the coming day of the Lord, when we will experience in our own resurrected bodies the victory of Jesus over sin and death which we now possess through faith in the promise.

Abraham CORAM DEO

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

- Genesis 12:1

1. Read Genesis 12:1-9. What does God tell Abraham to do? What are the promises God makes to Abraham? What does Abraham do?

God tells Abraham to leave his homeland and go to a new land. Abraham will be given the whole land of Canaan, he will become a great nation, and through him all nations on the earth will be blessed (12:23). Abraham does what God says and believes what He promises. (Please read Hebrews 11:1-2, 11-19 to reinforce that we receive God's promises through faith.)

2. Read Genesis 15. What does God promise Abraham? What sign of comfort and certainty does God give Abraham in order to show that God will do and give what He promises? Does Abraham trust God's word of promise? What does it mean that God "credited it [Abraham's faith] as righteousness? See Romans 4:18-25.

Again God promises the land, that Abraham will be a great nation, and that through him all nations will be blessed. God makes a covenant of grace with Abraham. God makes the promise and He will do and deliver what He promises. The smoking firepot with a blazing torch symbolized God's presence (Exodus 3:2; 14:24; 19:18; 1 Kings 18:38). God passing through the pieces of the heifer, goat, ram, dove, and pigeon means that He will keep His promises to Abraham. In other words, God is telling Abraham that if He doesn't keep His promises, He'll be cut to pieces like the animals He passes through. Because God reckons the perfect obedience, passion, and death of Christ to believers as righteousness, Abraham can stand Coram Deo. In other words, Abraham is justified before God through faith alone for the sake of Christ alone.

3. Read Genesis 17:1-22 and Genesis 18:1-15. Again, God gives a promise to Abraham in 17:1-14. How does Abraham react to the promise of a son through Sarah in 17:5-17? What is Sarah's reaction to the promise? Why does God's promise seem so ridiculous?

The three parts of the promise are the same as we've heard before (17:48). Abraham and Sarah both laugh at God's promise to give them a son because they are senior citizens and Sarah has never been able to get pregnant. Please also note that circumcision was a physical reminder to Abraham and his descendants that they are God's chosen people by His gracious choosing.

4. Read Genesis 21:1-7. "Everything depends on God's word of promise!" How do the circumstances of Isaac's birth show this? Why was it so important later on for the nation of Israel to know this truth about her beginnings?

Abraham and Sarah could not have children humanly speaking. They were too old (see Genesis 17:17) and Sarah was always barren. Yet God makes a promise and does exactly what He says He will do. God is gracious. He graciously gives these two old folks Isaac, the son of laughter. God creates. God gives. God saves. He keeps His promises. Later on, Israel would be given to trust God's word of promise in the face of immense difficulties and crises.

5. How is Jesus' life before God also our life before God? Read Romans 6:4-5. How are we incorporated into the death, life, and glory of Christ? Read Colossians 3:1-3. Where is our life before God now?

Abraham's faith if put to the test when God tells him to sacrifice his one and only son Isaac. During this time of trial Abraham clings to God's promise. He trusts God against God (see verse 8). Such faith in God's promise is what God wants from us. Such faith in God's staggering promises of life and salvation puts us right with Him (Romans 4:11-22; Galatians 3:6). God once again makes the three fold promise that we've witnessed in the above texts.

6. Read Romans 4. How is Abraham our "father"? Does God work the same way with us as He did with Abraham? If so, how?

St. Paul tells us that Abraham is "the father of all who believe" or "the father of us all" who believe in God's word of promise – especially His promise that salvation comes through the promised Savior Jesus who was "delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification," (4:25). God still deals with us through His word of promise that we are saved by faith in Christ Jesus the Savior. We too safely stand Coram Deo because of Jesus and His righteousness.

Jesus

CORAM DEO

... here
in Baptism
there is
brought free
to every man's
door
just such
a priceless
medicine
which
swallows up
death
and saves
the lives of
all men.

- The Large Catechism

1. Read Romans 5:12-21. How is Jesus the "second Adam?" Would you say that Jesus is the new Head of humanity or that Jesus is the Head of a new humanity? Explain your thinking. 1 Corinthians 15:22 states, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." What does this tell you about Christ's victory over death?

The question is intended to cause discussion. Jesus is both the new Head of all humanity, and He also is the Head of a new humanity that has been baptized into Him. Christ's victory extends as far as Adam's sin. As in Adam all are dragged into sin and death, so in Christ all are dragged into justification and life. (Recall the image of the kingdom of God as a dragnet that catches all sorts of fish - Matthew 13:47ff.)

2. Read Hebrews 2:10-17. Why was it essential to humanity's salvation that the Son of God become Man? What was Jesus' priesthood before God and how did He fulfill it? Why is it important that Jesus Himself suffered and was tempted? See Hebrews 4:14-16. What does Jesus' high priesthood mean for us, His baptized priests?

Jesus had to suffer our sufferings and death and fully partake of our human nature. To be a high priest representing us before the Father, the Son had to literally become Man so that He might offer His own life as a substitute sacrifice for all of humanity. Since He was tempted in every way as we are and did not sin, and He suffered in every way as we suffer, including dying our death, He is the perfect high priest to stand for us. As baptized believers, we are able to stand Coram Deo as priests to God because we stand under the High Priest Jesus Christ.

3. Read Matthew 5:17-20. What did Jesus come to do with the Law and the Prophets? In what way(s) did Jesus fulfill the Law actively? In what way(s) did Jesus fulfill the law passively? Why are both Jesus' active and passive obedience before God essential to our salvation? See Matthew 5:20, 48. What are the standards of the law? Do you meet those standards? How then can a sinner stand before God?

Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Actively, Jesus kept all the commandments to the letter, not only in action but also in attitude. This is called His "active obedience." He also passively fulfilled the Law by coming under the curse and condemnation of the Law in our place. This is called His "passive obedience." Since He kept the Law perfectly, He alone is perfect as His Father in heaven is perfect. In Him we, too, are perfect, covered with His obedience and righteousness. In other words, we can claim to be perfect and holy Coram Deo as we are in Jesus, for only Jesus is perfect and holy Coram Deo in Himself.

4. Read Philippians 2:5-11. This "Christ Hymn" deals with three verbs: Jesus' emptying Himself, humbling Himself, and His being exalted. What did the Son do in His emptying Himself of His divine honor and glory? What did He do in His humbling? What did He do in His exaltation? Do you think Jesus "descent into hell" was part of His humbling or His exaltation? Explain.

In emptying Himself, Jesus set aside His divine honor and glory at the right hand of the Father and took on the form of a servant. He became a "bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh." As Man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to His own Law, including receiving the punishments of the Law in His own flesh. In His exaltation, Jesus was raised from the dead and His victory is proclaimed in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. His "descent into hell" is the proclamation of that victory "under the earth," so that Jesus is confessed Lord and Christ from the heights of heaven to the depths of hell.

5. How is Jesus' life before God also our life before God? Read Romans 6:4-5. How are we incorporated into the death, life, and glory of Christ? Read Colossians 3:1-3. Where is our life before God now?

We are joined to Jesus' death and life in Baptism. Therefore, His death is our death; His life is our life. In fact, we are already seated in glory at the right hand of God. Not yet in ourselves - but in Christ, where our life actually is, we are already risen and glorified. On the last day, we will finally experience in our own bodies what is not already true for us in Christ. Therefore now, we stand Coram Deo by faith and not by sight, trusting that our life is now hidden with Christ in God.

YOU CORAM DEO

... the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

- The Small Catechism

1. What do you deserve from God because of the sinful nature inherited from Adam, and your own sin? Read Romans 4:15; 6:21, 23a; 5:12, 16, 18; Galatians 3:13.

Sinners deserve God's temporal and eternal wrath and His condemnation (both physical and eternal death – the curse of damnation).

2. How do you know of you your sin, your sinful condition, and His condemnation of you? See Exodus 20:3-17. What is the role of God's Law in your life? See 1 Samuel 2:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Galatians 3:24.

The Law is like a mirror in that it shows us our sin. It reveals that we are sinners. This is important because we as sinners want to believe the lie that we are not sinners! So God's Law, like an X-ray or CT scan machine, shows us who we are before Him: sinners in absolute rebellion against him.

God uses the Ten Commandments (His divine word of Law) to kill the old Adam in you, that is to say, to demolish any and all of your striving to save yourself by what you do or don't do. Why? So that you'll look to Jesus for salvation and not the Law – that you'll use Jesus for salvation and not the Law. Or as Hannah confessed about what the Lord does with sinners for their eternal benefit: "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up."

3. What is the Gospel? Why is it good news for YOU? Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Also Romans 1:16; 2 Corinthians 3:6; and 1 Corinthians 1:2.

The Gospel is the proclamation of Jesus, who suffered, died and rose from the dead for sinners! It is the power of God to save you. You can't save yourself – God does in Christ. The Gospel shows and gives nothing but God's grace and divine forgiveness won and achieved by Christ in His suffering, death and resurrection. This Word of Gospel actually does what it promises: it raises the dead and gives you new life!

4. What is Absolution? See Luke 24:47; John 20:19-23.

Absolution is the spoken word of the Gospel – forgiveness – all for Christ's sake. It is regularly proclaimed by the pastor either publicly or privately or by any Christian in his/her vocation to those who have been crushed by the Law and who desire and hunger for the Gospel.

5. What are the gifts given in the Lord's Supper? See 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and Matthew 26:26-28.

With the bread and the wine Jesus gives you to eat with your mouth His true body and blood with the promise that your sins are forgiven. The Small Catechism teaches that, "where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation."

6. Why are God's gifts for you in Word and Sacrament important Coram Deo?

Through Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper Jesus comes to you to proclaim and apply to you the forgiveness of sins that He won for you on the cross. You stand before God the Father as justified, forgiven, sanctified all for Christ's sake. He is not angry with you. He loves you! Eternal life and heaven is yours for Christ's sake.

7. What does it mean for a Christian to follow Jesus? Read Matthew 16:24-25.

It means to deny oneself! In other words, you are not your own savior. Jesus is! And so to follow Jesus is to die ("take up your cross")! It is the death of the old sinful Adam that God Himself works in you through the application of the Law. Jesus' cup of tea, however, is raising the dead! Through faith in Him you have life – abundant life – eternal life.

8. What is the meaning of Baptism for your daily life? See Romans 6:4, 11; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Luke 24:46-47; Ephesians 4:22-24.

The daily rhythm of death and resurrection first began at your Baptism. Just as you were buried with Christ into His all sin-forgiving death and raised with Him for a new life in Holy Baptism, so every day of your life is the life of Holy Baptism. That's daily death to sin and the life of faith in Christ.

You are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection so you are to think differently about yourselves Coram Deo – dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus!