

WHY MANY IN LUTHERANISM HAVE LOST THE HISTORIC TEACHINGS

One book of Lutheran teaching - the Book of Concord, yet today we see many doctrinal differences in Lutheranism, cases of dramatic differences where even opposites are being taught, all under the name "Lutheran." What is happening in Lutheranism is a reflection of what has happened for even a longer period of time on the larger scene of Christianity.

There is only one true God and He has written only one book - the Bible- and yet Christians do not all believe or confess the same thing.

God Himself explains the source of this problem. The primary source is the devil who in the Garden of Eden introduced confusion by lying and contradicting the clear words of the Creator. That Father of Lies remains active to this day in both Christianity and Lutheranism. He takes the teachings of the Bible so clear from God's own Spirit and he substitutes lies and plants the seeds of doubt. (Gen.3, John 8:44)

The devil has other agents to aid him in his deception of souls. In these New Testament times the devil has raised up the power and cunning of the Antichrist. (II Thess.2:3-12) Witness how the Roman Papacy has led a spiritual falling away from the basic truth of Christianity that a man is justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law; the Antichrist has even sought to regain back into his fold members of the Lutheran Church, the group that in its original confessions clearly revealed and exposed him as the Antichrist, Satan's agent. (See Book of Concord, Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article IV)

There is also the legion of false prophets who run around saying "Thus says the LORD," yet the LORD has not sent them. (Jer. 23:21,31-32). They use their own tongues in place of the Word of God and with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Romans 16:17-18)

But the student of the Bible and Church History can detect a pattern to the attacks of all three - the Devil, the Antichrist, and False Prophets. Perhaps an illustration might help. Picture a human body. As we have already seen, the teaching of Justification is the heart. Let's picture the Bible as the brain, for Scripture imparts knowledge. The means of grace would be the supply part; let's say, the lungs and stomach, responsible for providing oxygen and nourishment to the whole body. To continue the illustration, the doctrine of church fellowship could be likened to the immune system, which is designed to ward off the attack or invasion of foreign substances.

The liar and his cohorts know that it is too obvious to propose brain or heart surgery, to simply cut off the head or cut out the heart. No patient would consent. So they employ a subtler approach to reach their ultimate goal of destroying the teaching of justification. By introducing just a dose of false doctrine, they interject into the system what the Bible calls "gangrene" or cancer. Left unchecked, the cancer will grow with the potential to eat away the lungs and stomach, the brain and finally the heart. Proper treatment must be to remove the cancer. Thus the teaching of church fellowship calls for the removal of or separation from the cancer, whatever is contrary to God's Word.

We mentioned that the attacks on God's teachings are subtle at first. Just as no one sets out to get cancer, so no true Christian sets out to lose God's Word. How is the attack started? Perhaps it comes through the lie that "bigger is better". "If we had a large group, we could do more good in the church". Yet the strength of Christ's Church has always been the Gospel, not its size of numbers. (Romans 1:16; Ephesians 6:11-17; Revelation 3:7-13) In fact, the Bible accounts of the Flood and of Sodom and Gomorrah teach us that the majority is often wrong.

Sometimes the attack comes because church leaders have been contaminated by the philosophy and vain deceit of the world's wisdom and have lost sight of the highest wisdom, Jesus Christ (Col.2). They fall into error because they place the theories of men above the infallible Word of God. A six-day creation is considered impossible, not because the Bible is unclear (Exodus 20:11, Genesis 1&2) but because the science of man tells us so. The Bible clearly teaches the incarnation of God's Son (that He became true man-Gal. 4:4-5; John 1:1,14) but the human mind rejects what it cannot comprehend. Homosexuality was sinful for the people of the Old and New Testament, (Genesis 19; Romans 1:27; I Cor. 6:9-10) but we are now in an "enlightened" world, an enlightenment that comes not from the Bible but rather from the darkness of the human heart.

Another example - "It's not possible to agree in every teaching of the Bible, so we will agree to disagree". Just as no one but the Holy Spirit can make another person a Christian, (I Cor. 12:3) so no one but God can make a true union around Scripture. Unity in doctrine is a gift of the Holy Spirit, not the product of back room dickering and the trading back and forth of God's precious truths as if they were a pack of baseball cards. God would not instruct His people to unite only around His Word (I Cor. 1:10) if it were not possible to do so. As a Christian clings only to God's Word, each and every part of it, God Himself will put His child into a church family of other like-minded believers.

"There is nothing new under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9) One God, one Bible, one invisible Holy Christian Church, but many visible churches. We have studied the why - the forces of evil attacking God's Word - and have looked briefly at the how - the introduction of some false doctrine which will spread to infect the whole. But it is hard to understand how relentless and how frequent these attacks come. Again the Word of God reveals the truth. II Timothy is one of the last epistles of the Apostle Paul and was written to a young pastor, the words of one generation to the next. It is only four chapters long, yet in every chapter the Spirit through Paul speaks of truth attacked by error.

Chapter One

v.13-14 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

v.15 This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

Chapter Two

v.15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

v.16-18 But shun profane and idle babble, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

Chapter Three

v.14-16 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for 3.

v.6-8,13 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt

doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

minds, disapproved concerning the faith; But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Chapter Four

v.2-5 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

(Passages from the New King James Version)

10a,14-15 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world- Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.

What was true in the days of Paul,
and was true in the days of Luther
also is true today.

The names change from Hymenaeus and Philetus to Braaten and Jenson, but the truth of God's Word remains under attack. Paul's teaching was based on God's Word, but was attacked. Luther's teaching was based on God's Word, but was attacked. True Lutheran teaching is based on God's Word, but is attacked - even in the name of Lutheranism.

We began this evening with a historic view of the chief article of all Scripture - Justification- and we reviewed its relationship to Scripture, to the Means of Grace and to Church Fellowship. We close with an inversion of the order - Fellowship - Means of Grace - Scripture - Justification. The forces of evil will start at the bottom in the hope of finally reaching the top. They will infect the teaching of Fellowship with the goal of spreading to the Means of Grace and Scripture in order to attack and destroy God's message of Justification.

We know the enemy and the plan of attack. How shall we defend ourselves? Recall the words of Paul to Timothy.

- Hold fast the pattern of sound words
- Rightly divide the Word of truth
- Continue in the things you have learned, in the verbally inspired Scriptures.
- Preach the Word, be watchful.

Recall the prayer of our Savior: "Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth." John 17:17

May God's Spirit make each of us diligent students of the Holy Word and with that Word defend us against all error and preserve us in the saving truth.

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