



DID GOD REALLY SAY...STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH?

~ ROMANS 16:17-19 ~

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¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. ¹⁹ Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.



Grace, mercy and peace are yours through our Lord Jesus Christ,

John Smith recently got a job transfer to Somewhere, USA, and one of the first things he does after saying “Hi” to the Bud Light mayor of Somewhere, USA is hop online and go to the WELS Locator to see if he can find a WELS church nearby. As luck would have it, St. Jehosophat’s Lutheran Church is only 5 blocks away. He attends a service there on the first Sunday he is in town and is pleased to find it teaches the same thing as his previous WELS church he attended. He speaks with the pastor and starts the process of a simple transfer into membership at St. Jehosophat’s Lutheran Church.

A family goes on vacation to southern California. On Sunday morning, they load up in the car and drive 20 minutes to go to church – St. Bartholomew Lutheran Church. It happens to be a communion Sunday. They speak with an usher before the service and explain they are visiting from Arizona and attend St. Mark’s Lutheran Church. The usher invites them to take communion with the congregation.

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.” These are two examples of the unity we share in life, in faith, in doctrine in this church body we call the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. It is a wonderful blessing of Christian fellowship that my sister and brother-in-law were able to simply transfer their membership down here to Grace. It is a wonderful blessing of Christian fellowship that my parents – missionaries in India – are able to partake in communion with us. It is a wonderful blessing of Christian fellowship that people I just meet from Wisconsin or Michigan share the same faith as me based on the unity we share in the WELS.

Unfortunately, the devil will do anything within his power to destroy this unity, either from without or from within. From the inside, this unity can lead us to think that we are an exclusive club that you can only be born into. From the outside, this unity can lead others to accuse us of being unloving and unfriendly. Neither of these are Godly attitudes to have. Yet does this mean that we must abandon or dilute our unity? Does this mean we shouldn’t worry about standing up for the truth? That is the question we have before us this morning, DID GOD REALLY SAY TO STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH?

1. Rejoice in obedience
2. Watch out for correction

In his first chapter of Romans, Paul wrote a sentence that serves as a theme for the book. A sentence that is familiar to many Christians. **“I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.”** Paul then goes on to explain and describe the Christian faith over the next 15 chapters of Romans – the most in depth treatment found in all of Scripture. And now, before Paul signs his farewell to the letter, we have these words before us. Strong words of urging, strong words of encouragement **“to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way.”** This serves as the second bookend to the book of Romans, connecting to the first bookend of unashamedly proclaiming the gospel.

Paul’s urging is to **“watch out for those who put divisions and obstacles.”** Like a watchman on guard against advancing enemy forces, so Christians watch out. This is the picture Paul uses. But who and what are these obstacles that Paul is talking about? He’s not talking about watching out for those who completely reject the gospel message (this is something we should do anyway), but his injunction is to watch out for believers who are errorists and teaching falsely.

Like we learned last week, we find once again Paul is a realist. Despite God’s desire for Christians to not be divided, the unfortunate reality of sin has resulted in divisions, even with Christian churches. Some of these divisions are not harmful – such as a division over which translation of the Bible is better – the NIV, KJV or the ESV. But then there are the divisions that come between what God’s Word says. Divisions are created when people **“are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.”**

Many times though, people don’t know they’re serving their own appetites, many times they think they are serving God. Just look at the Apostle Paul. In his earlier life his name was Saul and he was persecuting the Christian church, and he thought he was doing God’s will. If Paul could be wrong, we would be foolish to think that we couldn’t be wrong. Don’t just rest on what others have said, instead search the Scriptures. And yet there are individuals, and even entire church bodies who hold to this truth – “I can’t be wrong, this is what God says, everyone else is incorrect.” This can be on any number of topics in Scripture – how are people saved, baptism, Lord’s Supper, the end times just to name a few.

But God does not have 20 different ways the world will end, there will only be one. And all of these other ideas, all of these other thoughts have their origin in the devil – the father of lies. The devil knows that a frontal assault on Christianity may not have the best success. But he chips away at the corners, comes in from the side, comes and attacks from behind. Just like he attacked Eve with, “Did God really say...” he attacks us as well with, “Did God really say...” We have taken a look at a number of these topics over the summer to see what God really says about things. We do this so that we may be **“wise about the good and innocent about what is evil.”**

“Being wise about the good,” is what we strive for as Christians. **“Being wise about the good,”** means we take God’s Word seriously. **“Being wise about the good”** means looking at what God’s Word actually says instead of trying to weasel around the meaning. **“Being wise about the good,”** is the reason we don’t just rejoice in unity, but in unity in obedience. **“Being wise about the good”** is the reason that in the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod we practice a member communion. Because while Scripture talks about the incredible

blessings of communion, Scripture also talks about the harm and condemnation communion can bring upon someone who is not prepared. Practicing member communion is not only a way that we express our unity as believers, but a way that we show concern for others.

“**Being wise about the good**” in this way does not mean that those outside of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod are not Christian. It does not mean that those outside of the Wisconsin Synod are not going to heaven. It also does not mean that those who are within the Wisconsin Synod are perfect by any means. It means that we rejoice in obedience. An obedience we can never give. Yes, even those of us within the Wisconsin Synod are susceptible to thinking lustful thoughts, prideful thoughts, hurtful thoughts, because we too have that sinful nature. Even on our best days we don’t give God the obedience he demands. An obedience we could never give, but an obedience given for us.

It was Christ’s obedience for us that tipped the scales in our favor before God. It was Christ taking our punishment for sins on the cross. It was Christ’s resurrection that guarantees our status before God. And before Christ ascended into heaven, he gave his disciples a mission, he gave them a purpose. **“Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”**

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This is why we rejoice in obedience, this is why we watch out for correction. Having covered over our sins, we are now perfect before God. Our perfect status before God gives us the desire to listen to Jesus. The **“everything I have commanded you”** Jesus was talking about, was everything that pointed to him as the Savior, it’s everything that Paul himself wrote in Romans, it’s everything that God has given to us in the Bible. This is why we rejoice in following it, this is why we heed God’s warning through Paul to **“watch out for those who cause divisions.”**

And so a Bible believing Christian will walk a narrow road. On the one hand we would love to be perfectly united with all Christians. But on the other hand we want to give a clear confession of the truth, which will mean watching out for and avoiding those who teach contrary to God’s Word. Because the incorrect fallacies about God and his Word do not stand on equal footing as the truth about God’s Word. It is out of Christian love that we will lovingly seek correction from others, and that we will lovingly share correction with others.

Unfortunately, disagreeing with one another isn’t the politically correct thing to do. Unfortunately in a post-modern society with no absolute truth every idea is given equal footing. But we know from God’s Word that isn’t the case. Either Christ is the way, the truth and the life, or he isn’t. Either baptism saves, or it doesn’t. Either the Bible is God’s Word or it isn’t. Either Christ will come to judge or he won’t. There is no way both sides of each statement can stand. And as believers we trust the only way that stands is God’s Way.

And how do we know God’s way apart from actually going back into God’s Word instead of parroting back answers you learned when you were growing up? (Yes, even Lutheran answers.) Jesus said in our gospel this morning that we are to be **“as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”** You can know what God’s Word says, but if all you do is go around and declaring everyone is sinful and going to hell, you won’t have a

very large audience. Instead, you can proclaim God's Word in a way reveals their sin, followed by the gospel message to heal their sin. Anyone that gets in the way of this clear confession – no matter how well intended – are the smooth talking deceivers.

So, I have this clear confession in my church. But then how do I apply it in my daily life? How do I proclaim my clear confession with those who do not believe the same way as me? Does it mean I can never interact with them again? Of course not. Perhaps the story of Naaman from the Old Testament is instructive. Naaman, the Syrian general, had been healed of leprosy by washing seven times in the Jordan River on the instructions of the Lord's prophet, Elisha. Naaman confessed his faith in the true God. But upon returning to Syria, Naaman was concerned about the fact that his official duties required him to accompany his king to the temple of the idol Rimmon. When the king bowed down to Rimmon, he leaned on Naaman's arm, and Naaman was obliged to bow also. "When I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this," Naaman said to Elisha. "Go in peace," the prophet answered. Naaman's public confession was clear. Every one realized that he was not going to the temple of Rimmon to worship Rimmon.

So DID GOD REALLY SAY TO STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH? Yes he did. Making a clear confession for the truth not only in which church we belong to, but also in our personal lives. As Christians, we will always be striving for unity with other believers, but not at the expense of the truth. That would be similar to stitching up a wound before cleaning it out, it would not be good. As Christians who find a unity of faith with other believers, we should not let the devil lead us to think of ourselves as somehow better than others. But what better compliment would we receive from our Father in heaven to say, "I have heard about your obedience and rejoice because of you, you were wise to what was good, and innocent about what was evil." Amen.