

The Lutheran Taste Test

To the saints at Catalina, grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's sermon text is from our Epistle reading:

For the Word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ¹

Credit is given to the book *Has American Christianity Failed* by Bryan Wolfmueller.

Today, Christians of every stripe are saying it does not matter about the details of doctrine as long as we believe in Jesus we are all united in Christ. (*Talk about the "ecumenical" situation in Watonga, Oklahoma.*)

I have before me five bottles of water. Each has a different flavor of Kool-Aid. Each is composed of mostly water. Say the pineapple is Lutheran, the grape is Baptist, etc... One problem though, four of the bottles contain a little bit of arsenic. A colorless, tasteless poison. "But that should not matter, I can assure you the bottles contains mostly water, and that is what counts, right?"

So can we use that same analogy with the tenants of most of the popular American Christianity that holds to the Arminian way. "Our differences are not that important, you can go to any church that you please." How can we detect the spiritual arsenic in popular American Christianity? Without an understanding of what is dangerous to our faith in each we cannot determine in which it is O.K. to take part.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:18, 19.

There are four characteristics about American Christianity as it is practiced by most denominations in America that can shipwreck our faith; dangerous characteristic that are spiritually invisible without the litmus test of the Bible and a church that sticks to the Lutheran Confessions.

Test No. 1 is to detect the spiritual arsenic: **Revivalism** teaches that the Christian life begins with a personal decision to accept Christ.

- For most Christians, their decision for Christ is both the beginning and the end of everything in their Christian faith.
- For them Christianity is all about “you.”
- But in making **you** the center of the show, you fail to see the larger picture: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel.” Our salvation is **His work** from the very beginning (as declared in *Luther’s Small Catechism*).

Illustration: Letting in a talented Christian music group to play at your church, or taking your youth to a Christian music concert at the metro-auditorium.

- This desire to have everyone make their decision for Christ is the basis of revivalism for the other churches.
- This desire for a need for revivalism is a guilt trip placed on the church.

Test No. 2: **Pietism** teaches that the Christian life is chiefly marked by a growth in good works.

- The focus starts **with you** in conversion (Revivalism) and continues in this next test.

- Pietism makes growth in Good Works the chief aim of the Christian life.
- “Jesus died for you; what will you now do for Him?”
- It’s all about the law: “I will do better. I will try harder. I will make the change necessary in my life.” This whole emphasis is on **you** resolving to do better.
- The churches don’t help matters. For the sermons in the churches out there are mostly law-based: “10 steps to being more faithful in your relationship with your wife.”
- *“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Holy Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”²*
- “What are **you doing for Christ?**” replaces the preaching of what **God has done** for us in Christ.

Test No. 3: **Mysticism** teaches that we can have direct, unmediated access to God.

- Here again the focus is **on our** ability to come into direct contact with divinity.
- Christianity becomes more about my feelings and experience. If I am feeling **High on God**, God is near. If I am feeling nothing at all in my worship, God is not here and **I must** be doing something wrong. “
- God has **not** promised “the feeling” of forgiveness, he promises forgiveness itself. Even if we are **not** feeling that forgiveness.

² Galatians 3:3.

- God has not promised that we will experience His presence. He promises that He will never leave us or forsake us.
- The Lord delivers His comfort to us in the promise of the Gospel.
- “Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart.”³
- God is always there, it is not subjective effects that tell us whether he is there.

Test No. 4: **Enthusiasm** teaches that the spiritual life happens inside of us.

- This is the term that Luther used for the predecessors of most of the Protestant church groups that make up what is American Christianity today. He called these enthusiasts heretics.
- Theologically enthusiasm is the encouragement of looking to what is going on inside of us as more important than what the Scriptures say.
- When you ask an enthusiast how he or she hears the voice of God, the answer is **not** “from the pages of the Bible” or **not** the preaching you get every Sunday from our pastor, it is what my heart is telling me.
- Enthusiasm is what drives the terrible swing between pride and despair that marks the life of most American Christianity.
 - *“So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by the craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love we are to grown up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ.”*⁴

³ I John 3:2.

⁴ Ephesians 4: 14-15.

While you are saved by grace, faith is your armor. Satan knows that—he examines your faith with a fine-toothed comb looking for chinks in your faith armor. Satan tries to twist your faith or the faith of your denomination. What is wrong with an emphasis on self? Your faith becomes a swinging pendulum.

Either I am discouraged because I am not doing well as I would like as I think I should as a Christian (I am discouraged because I think God is **not** very happy with me), or I am overjoyed because I am doing so well in obeying God and think therefore that God is happy with me. This is like a buzz saw on your faith.

For the Word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is power of God [not **our** power to save]. We preach Christ Crucified [not Don crucified or Sue crucified, or Alan] it is an obstacle from many, but to those secure in the faith, it is Christ the **power of God** and the wisdom of God. I would rather have the foolishness of God and the cross because his weakness is stronger than the reason of men.

Today the average Christian looks at the difference between denominations as basically different flavors of Kool-Aid. This is a very superficial surface look at the churches, missing is any in-depth look at the differences and why, and what is missing or has been added to the theological mixture.

What is wrong with having an ecumenical attitude toward other denominations? You have lost the ability to suspect something is wrong with the other churches and you become blind to the understanding the spiritual arsenic in their glass of water.

Basically, an ecumenical American Christian has a low view of Church. A church for her is just a tool to keep herself spiritually vital. It is kind of like toilet paper or detergent. It is something she uses to clean up herself or her stuff. The actual brand of toilet paper or detergent is not that critical. "She" is what is important and so "she" makes the decisions. The ecumenical American Christian may not actually say it aloud, but she is considering herself more important than the Church. Let's go back to our Kool-Aid. You are deciding which Kool-Aid is right for you based on color and taste. But you cannot detect the arsenic without the lab tests. You go merrily on your way drinking your favorite drink. The church provides you with that lab test. (elaborate)

Today's Gospel reading reminds us:

*Whoever loves his life loses it and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*⁵

Does that mean that the Evangelical American Christians are bound for hell?

Illustration: "Who are those people in that room over there?"

Separation from complete truth is a wounded condition; a spiritual impoverishment.

Illustration: I show my catechism class pictures of starving children in Africa and compare that to our condition if we try to live without the Lutheran church and its doctrines.

Lutherans seek the fullness of life in Christ, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation laid out for us in Bible and the Lutheran

⁵ John 12:25

Confessions. Many times when churches try to get together in some type of unity, they seek for the lowest common denominator in doctrinal understanding among themselves. Elaborate.

Whether we like it or not, fiery serpents surround us and the Bible says they masquerade as the angels of light. The only way the Israelites were saved was gazing upon the one bronze serpent and that symbolizes the Cross of Jesus, not in our abilities to detect the fiery serpents.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

[Note: Encourage people to get and read a copy of *Has American Christianity Failed* by Bryan Wolfmueller and if interested to get the book put out by Concordia Publishing, *The Lutheran Difference*.]

Numbers 21:4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 12:20-33

Midweek after the XIIIth Sunday following Trinity

September 13, 2017

Holy Cross Day (translated from September 14, 2017)

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