

Dear Members and Friends of St. John,

Max and his wife, Gertrude, decided to invite a group of friends over to their house for a dinner party. After everyone had arrived, Max made an announcement. The dinner that they were serving was made using the finest ingredients – organically grown vegetables, the finest meats – the very best. Ninety five percent of the meal was made with these ingredients. However, five percent of the meal was made with poison. That's right, deadly toxins that attack the human body. If you were at that dinner party, what would your reaction be? "Let's eat!" I doubt it. If you are like me, your reaction would be to run away.

An interesting thing causes pastors to turn prematurely gray: **When they discover what congregational members have been reading in their spare time.** Very frequently, we find out that our members are reading the latest Christian book by popular authors like Max Lucado, Charles Swindoll, Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, and others. It reminds me of St. Paul's words to the Corinth church, "*All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up*" (1 Cor. 10:23). While there are often very good things in these books, like the dinner party meal, there are spiritual toxins in them that will harm a person's faith. Let me give you an example. In a recent book by Max Lucado entitled *John 3:16*, the author is asked a question by someone that wrote to him. He was asked if there was anything that could cause a Christian to be outside of God's forgiveness and grace. This is an important question! **Lucado's response is toxic: "Not as long as you can pray."** Lucado was saying that praying to God for forgiveness provides all that you need. Lucado's response is **heresy**: a mistruth about the Christian faith and Scripture that leads people **away from Christ**. Lucado's denomination doesn't believe in the Sacraments – he doesn't believe that the Lord's Supper provides forgiveness of sins, and that Baptism is God's work that brings us to faith in Christ, and provides eternal life in heaven. He also doesn't believe in Confession and Absolution. Without these truths, he *must* turn to prayer as the only way for a person to receive forgiveness. This turns **prayer into a "good work" that you can do** to earn your forgiveness. But this isn't what the Bible teaches. **We can do nothing to earn forgiveness** (see Romans 3:28; Romans 4:5; Gal. 5:4-5).

When people tell me that prayer is providing them with all the forgiveness they need from God, I invariably ask this question: If you had just sinned, and before you were able to pray to God and ask Him for forgiveness, you got into a traffic accident and died, where would you be – heaven or hell? If you listen to Lucado, you would have to say, "hell." The Bible teaches that faith in Christ makes us holy and righteous in God's eyes. We are covered by the blood of Christ – our sins are forgiven instantly because of our faith. **Yes, God gives us Baptism, Confession/Absolution, and the Lord's Supper as real, tangible acts of His mercy and love, so that Satan can't trick us into believing that forgiveness is not real.** God knows our frailties. He knows our weaknesses. We need the Sacraments and Absolution. But all of these are **God's work for us, not our work for God.** Confessing our sin in prayer is important, not for forgiveness, but for a good and healthy relationship with our Lord.

This is only one example of the many errors that turn-up in these Christian best-sellers. And don't think you're smart enough to avoid falling into false beliefs. I knew seminary students that had to be

'detoxed' after reading these toxic materials for years. **Satan always uses very pleasing and reasonable arguments to lead us away from God's truth.** Heresies always lead to confusion, and confusion leads to doubt. If left unchecked, these doubts can lead to unbelief.

I've included an article in this month's newsletter, entitled, "Begone, Satan." This was written about a best-selling book called, "The Prayer of Jabez." Maybe some of you have read the book. It's very important that we avoid spiritual toxins that lead us away from Christ and His teachings. **God has given you a church that teaches the unaltered Word of God,** and a pastor who is working to keep you on **the narrow path that leads to salvation.** God is good and faithful. His one desire for you is that you remain connected to Him forever. He not only desires this, **He's busy working to keep you in safe in the one true faith.** May our Lord keep you safe from Satan's attacks, and bring you to eternal life with Him in heaven. Amen.

Pastor Travis