

Dear friends and members of St. John Lutheran:

From 2 Timothy 3:16-17: **"All Scripture** is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

I get asked all the time (in one form or another), "Pastor, how do we know that what we teach in the Lutheran church is correct? The Methodist's, Catholic's and others say that they do the same, and yet we differ in doctrine from them." I like the above Scripture reading, because it is *so* telling. Notice that St. Paul tells Timothy, his fellow servant of Christ, "ALL SCRIPTURE..." What Paul **did not** say is: "Pick out the Scripture that you like and use that to teach, reproof, correct and train-up."

First and foremost, does the church that you attend use ALL of the Word of God? **Every Christian denomination that I can think of claims that they're "Bible-based."** This statement, by itself, means **nothing**. For most denominations, the Bible is a smorgasbord of pithy words, useful sayings and ethical standards that get used for touting whatever doctrine the pastor wants to throw at you. **Take Scripture out of context, and you can turn Christianity into almost anything that you choose.** But the Bible doesn't allow this. We read from Ephesians 4:

*"There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, **one faith**, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."* (ESV).

Notice that there isn't supposed to be a multitude of variant **teachings of the faith** in God's church. **There is only one true set of beliefs, or doctrine.** We all should desire to grow into this doctrine – to be rooted in the truth. Paul continues with this theme in 1st Timothy:

*"If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of **the good doctrine** that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."* 1 Tim 4:6-8 ESV.

Also, from Romans 16:

*"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles **contrary to the doctrine** that you have been taught; avoid them."* Romans 16:17 ESV.

Every Christian should strive to learn the faith well enough to be able to recognize false teaching when they hear it or read it. How do pastors avoid slipping into false belief and the errant teaching of God's Word? Lutheran pastors are trained-up in the Lutheran Confessions. The LCMS church uses the Book of Concord (Lutheran Confessions) as a correct exposition of the Bible. Written in the 16th Century, the Book of Concord uses Scripture (and Scripture alone) to frame the one true doctrine of the church. Most telling is the fact that the authors of the Book of Concord used **the entire Bible** to teach and defend the **one true faith**.

Second, you should look for **a church that administers the sacraments in a way that the Bible teaches is correct.** The Lutheran church confesses that Christ is given in holy Baptism and adopts a person into the family of God. We also confess that along with the bread and wine in the Lord's

Supper, the body and blood of Christ are truly present as Jesus says, "this is my body.....this is my blood." A faithful church will provide a clear explanation of the sacraments and how to participate. They will base their administration of these sacraments on God's Word – and **only** God's Word.

Finally, **a faithful church will provide the worshipper with the opportunity to confess their sins, and receive the forgiveness that Christ freely offers.** Absolution is **not** the pastor speaking to the people, but God speaking forgiveness through **the voice** of the pastor. Note how Absolution (or the speaking of forgiveness) is not man's work, but God's work for your benefit.

Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me.*" (John 14:6 ESV). **There's only one true pathway to heaven. There's only one true doctrine in Christian faith.** God provides us with His means so that we can remain on the narrow pathway that leads to heaven. We have His Word and Sacraments. **The true Christian church will not deviate from these means of God's grace.**

Most Christians find a church to attend, using **a hit-and-miss approach.** They look for friendly people, ample opportunities for fellowship and worship, and **they completely ignore what is being taught.** People tell me all the time, "All Christian churches are the same. It doesn't matter where you attend." I wish that were the case. Please know that **you are attending a congregation that values the Gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper.** May all of us learn to value these means of God's grace as the greatest of earthly treasures.

Pastor Travis