

Lord, Help Me Confess Your Word Clearly!
2 Timothy 3:14-17 November 4, 2018 Pastor Robert Hein

Dear Fellow Children of God,

Sometimes when I interact with people outside of our congregation, they find out that I am a Lutheran pastor, and they are curious to know what our church teaches. So they ask me questions like, "What is the Wisconsin Synod view on Creation, or what is the Lutheran opinion of gay marriage, or what is the Wisconsin Synod view of Baptism? Now, I understand the questions – there are many different churches out there with many different teachings, and they want to know what we believe and teach.

But in my answer I always want to stress to people that we don't really have a "Lutheran" opinion on Creation, or a "WELS" opinion about marriage, or a "Lutheran" opinion about Baptism, or any other doctrine for that matter. No, our teachings are based solely upon what God says about the matter in his Word. So, we don't want you to believe anything just because the WELS says so, or the pastor thinks so, or Lutherans teach it. We do however, want you to hold to those sacred truths which are revealed to us in God's holy Word, the Bible. That is the authority we follow for everything we teach and believe at our church.

Now with all the different churches out there promoting different teachings, it is easy to become confused. Also, we live in an age today where all truth is considered relative; where one person's teachings are considered to be no more or less valid than anyone else. There is no one absolute standard of right or wrong, no one trustworthy source of religious truth that people rely on. And so many people today wonder if there is anything they can truly be certain of, or any truth which they can really count on.

Christian friends, I have some good news for you. God has not left us wondering and stumbling about in the darkness. He has given us a sure guide for Christian faith and for godly living. It's all right here in the Bible! Paul says the Holy Scriptures are able to make you **wise for salvation** through faith in Christ Jesus. In this book God reveals the greatest good news we could ever hear, a gospel message which fills our hearts with peace and hope and joy. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that

whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Yes, saving “faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.”

Romans 10:17

Understand then that the Bible is not merely a collection of manmade ideas and personal opinions. It’s not what Moses thought about Creation or how Paul felt about baptism. No, the God who created this world and provided us with the gift of his Son to be our Savior has also clearly revealed these precious truths to us in the Bible.

In our devotion today, the Apostle Paul teaches us that all Scripture is “**God-breathed**”. This expression helps us understand the miracle of Verbal Inspiration. God didn’t just give Moses and David and Peter and Paul the general idea to write a book. No, he told them what to write word for word. He put his very own words into their mouth. Like a musician blows into a trumpet to make it play a specific note, so God breathed into Moses and the prophets, and Paul and the apostles the exact truths he wanted to reveal to us today.

The Apostle Peter described the miraculous source of the Bible this way, “**Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**” 2 Peter 1:21

Let me ask you a question. How long is an inch? You might think it is this long. You might think it is this long. Someone else might think an inch is this long. Now, if all those opinions are considered to be equally valid, that would be pretty confusing, wouldn’t it? No one would know for sure how long an inch really is. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to construct a building based on that kind of confusion? So how do you know for sure how long an inch really is? Well you can use this ruler as a sure guide. It provides an absolute standard for the measure of an inch. So we can compare your idea of how long an inch is, and your idea of how long an inch is with this standard to determine whether your idea is true or false. If it agrees with this standard, it is true. But if it disagrees with this standard, then it is false.

The same holds true for determining religious truth. In this country everyone has the right to their own opinion. But that does not make every opinion equally true and valid. In religious matters, all opinions and every belief needs to be tested and compared to the perfect standard God provides us in his Word.

The Apostle Paul tells us, Since the Bible is God-breathed, since it is God's absolute standard for all we believe and teach, therefore, **“it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

500 years ago a young monk named Martin Luther was put on trial before the Holy Roman Emperor King Charles the V at the Diet of Worms. Luther was accused of spreading false teaching and was ordered to recant, to renounce all of his writings. Martin Luther faced intense pressure to conform to the authority of the church and the teachings of the pope. But Luther refused to recant because he appealed to a higher authority than what “the church says”. He relied on what God says in the Bible. Luther responded, “Unless I am convinced by the Word of God and clear reason, my conscience is held captive to the Word of God, I cannot and will not recant so help me God. Amen.”

500 years later, our church still answers to the battle cry of the Reformation – “Sola Scriptura”, or God's Word alone.

Now some churches offer lip service to the Bible, but when it comes right down to it, they regard other sources to be superior to the Bible. This drove Martin Luther crazy in his debates with his opponents. Luther would always want to quote Scripture to back up his beliefs, but his opponents would quote the traditions of the church or the pronouncements of the Pope as the final authority. Today, some people regard scientific theories to be the 67th book of the Bible, and actually to be superior to the rest of the Bible. So if the 66 books of the Bible teach us that God created the world in six days by his almighty power like it says in Genesis, but scientific theories say we evolved from lower to higher life forms over millions of years, they believe it is appropriate to compromise what the Bible teaches in order to agree with what leading experts say instead.

The same holds true for the use of human reason or popular public opinion. I can guarantee you that God's Word has not changed what it teaches about God's definition of marriage or the God-pleasing practice of our sexuality only between a husband and wife in marriage. What has changed however is society's view of these matters, and public opinion polls. And so once again, some people believe we must now reinterpret the Bible to make it agree with their own line of thinking. But that is backward thinking!

As a comparison, that would mean instead of using this ruler to determine how long an inch is, they first decide how long they feel an inch should be, and then they bend the ruler to make it agree with their own ideas. But that doesn't work for making proper measurements, and it doesn't work for determining religious truth either. In the verses just following our devotion today, the Apostle Paul warned us about compromising God's truth to make it agree with man-made teachings. He said, **"The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."** 2 Timothy 3:3-4

Now it is okay for a church to have teachings and confessions they hold to. But we must always judge those confessions by the ruler of God's Word, and our teachings must never stand in opposition to it.

Actually, we confess our Christian faith every time we come here to church. Often we use the Apostles Creed or the longer Nicene Creed on Communion Sundays. Now, you won't find these creeds spelled out word for word in just one chapter of the Bible. But I can guarantee you that every phrase of the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed is drawn from the Bible and is in complete harmony with it. Christians throughout the world have used these creeds for 2000 years to clearly confess what the Bible teaches about the saving work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Our church today still uses Martin Luther's Small Catechism as a tool to convey the key truths of the Bible to others, especially our children. But I want to make something very clear. We don't worship Martin Luther. We don't regard what Martin Luther says

to be the authority in our church. His teachings are not equal to or superior to the Word of God. His catechism is useful only because it offers a clear summary of what the Bible teaches about God. Luther's explanations to the six chief parts of the Bible; the 10 Commandments, the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Confession and the Ministry of the Keys are so well written that 500 years later we still use them today to confess our Christian faith and pass it on to our children. But the Catechism and the creeds are not the source of our teachings. God's Word is. Our creeds and confessions are useful only because they are harmony with what God clearly reveals to us in the Bible.

Most people know the story of Martin Luther taking his brave stand at the Diet of Worms. But understand this was not the end of Christians making bold testimonies. Luther took his famous stand in 1521. But 9 years later, in 1530, King Charles again tried to crush the Reformation and force Lutherans to recant their teachings and come back under the control of the Roman church. This time a number of Lutheran princes was called to another trial, the Diet of Augsburg. They too were ordered to recant. But, like Martin Luther, these brave Christians stood strong, firm and steadfast in the face of fierce peer pressure, for they took their stand solely upon the authority of God's Word. And they presented the emperor with a beautiful summary of their Lutheran teachings called the Augsburg Confession. This document is so well written that even today it offers a clear summary of the key teachings of the Bible centered in Christ. With the Augsburg Confession these German princes wanted to make it clear that they were not some weird cult, nor were they inventing some new "Lutheran" doctrines that ran contrary to Scripture. No, they were simply reaffirming the sacred truths revealed in the Bible from the beginning. So committed were they to these precious truths of the Bible, they were actually willing to die testifying to the truths of the Augsburg Confession rather than deny them. All of those German princes humbly bowed their heads before King Charles as one of them declared, "Even if you threaten to chop off our heads, we will not recant our teachings or compromise our beliefs."

We are blessed today because those brave Lutheran princes took their stand upon the Word of God and refused to compromise the truth. After many years of persecution and struggle, the Lutheran Church emerged as an independent Christian church body, based upon the fundamental truths that we are saved by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, as revealed in God's word alone. This is the Reformation heritage we celebrate today!

But challenges to our faith and our teachings still remain. That old devil will never stop trying to distort the truth, deceive us, and lead us away from Christ into false beliefs, despair and other great and shameful sins. So we all need to keep our guard up. We all want to be people of the Word, constantly growing in our faith through worship, Bible study and home devotions. We all need to keep testing every teaching we hear and every opinion that is offered by the ruler of God's holy Word. We must hold on to the good and avoid every kind of evil, not only with our teachings, but also in daily living. Remember nothing less than the truth of the Gospel is at stake. Take to heart then Paul's encouragement to Timothy, "As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Amen.