

190. Which Is the True Visible Church?

Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. *Matt. 28, 20.*

It is not immaterial which one of the numerous visible churches we join; we must belong to the true one. Which is the true visible Church? God would have all men belong to the right one. We should not enter into union with false believers. Christ says: "Beware of false prophets!" His apostle warns: "Avoid them!" To be right and God-pleasing, a church union must follow Christ's rule: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed" and: "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Which, then, according to what we have now heard, is the true visible Church on earth? It is the Church which teaches the *entire* doctrine of the Word of God. It is the Church which observes *all* things that Christ has commanded us to teach. But does the so-called Christian Church of to-day teach the whole Word of Christ pure and undefiled? Although all the various denominations profess that they do, yet we find that in most cases their statement is not true. They have to a great extent rejected the true "doctrine of the Word of God."

But — praise and thanks to the gracious God! — there is a Church that teaches all the doctrines of the Word of God in their God-given purity and duly administers the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. This is our dear Lutheran Church. Our teaching and preaching is based solely upon the Word of God. The Scriptures rule supreme in our Church. When we thus speak of the Lutheran Church, we mean the Church as it has laid down its Creed in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church. In so far we have a right to speak thus of our Church. In our Confessions our doctrinal position has been laid down with such extreme care that no one has yet succeeded in pointing out to us any doctrinal deviation from the Bible. Especially do we accept the doctrine of justification alone by grace.

Prayer.

O Thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, graciously bless Thy Church upon earth and endow Thy servants with the gifts of Thy grace that they may rightly dispense Thy Word and Sacraments to all the people to the strengthening of their faith in Thee and the increase of love toward all men. Clothe Thy Church with the beauty of holiness and peace. Let no weapon prosper that is formed against her. Encourage the hearts and strengthen the hands of Thy faithful people in every place. Amen.

Lord Jesus, help, Thy Church uphold,
For we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold;
Indue Thy Word with power and grace
And spread its truth in every place.

O keep us in Thy Word, we pray;
The guile and rage of Satan stay;
Unto Thy Church grant, Lord, Thy grace,
Peace, concord, patience, fearlessness.

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