

191. The Authority of the Church.

One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. *Matt.* 23, 8.

Acknowledging no authority but His, the disciples of Christ were to be among themselves a common brotherhood, a spiritual democracy — the family of God. And when He withdrew from them His visible presence, He henceforth dwelt among them in His Word and Sacraments. By these means of grace He filled them with all the fruits of His redemption, and these means of grace He committed to His Church as an everlasting inheritance. This, then, is the Church: the company of disciples under the headship and leadership of Christ. Christ is the Ruler; for He alone has authority in His kingdom, in His holy Christian Church.

And this authority He exercises through the Word. He therefore declares: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed." To this supreme court our Church appeals to determine and to decide all articles of faith, to regulate all actions, settle all questions that may arise, adjust all difficulties, end all controversies. That authority is the highest court of appeal. The authority of Holy Writ is final. The rule and standard is: "Thus saith the Lord! It is written! Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

No council, synod, or any representative body, much less any Church Father, professor, doctor of divinity, or ministerial association, has any authority in the Church beyond that of the Word of God; no, decidedly not; for — "all ye are brethren." But whatever the Bible declares to be the truth, that the Christian Church accepts as true. Whatever the Bible declares to be error, that the Christian Church rejects, though the whole world, aye, an angel from heaven, should commend it as the sublimest wisdom. You cannot evade this authority, my dear Christian. If you do not submit to the Word of Christ, you are a spiritual rebel, a fugitive from divine justice, a standing insult to the divine authority of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou sole Authority and in Thy Church Thou only true Master of all Christendom, help us to labor with might and main to maintain and retain in our midst the Word of God in all its purity, to contribute willingly of our means toward the maintenance of Lutheran churches and schools, that the true visible Church may grow and our children's children may find in it the way of salvation. And grant us grace to remain saints of the holy Christian Church also by leading holy, godly lives; for we are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in us. Amen.

Thou holy Light, our Guide divine,
O cause the Word of Life to shine;
Teach us to know our God aright
And call Him Father with delight.
From error, Lord, our souls defend
That they on Christ alone attend,
In Him with living faith abiding,
In Him with all their might confiding.

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