

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – July 21st, 2024
ONE IN CHRIST

Prayer

Father, help us to remember that all whom you have called are indeed united; there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus, your Son, our Lord.

AMEN

Divided, Yet One

Last week, I spoke at length about the difference between how various Christian groups understand the assurance of their salvation. This week, I want to make sure you know that the Lutherans won't be the only ones in heaven.

General Revelation

One thing that even those who don't yet know the saving power of Jesus understand is natural law or general revelation.

In Romans, Paul provides a good summary of natural law (Rom 2:15):

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*They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts,
while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting
thoughts accuse or even excuse them,*

This, of course, is why almost all cultures and non-Christian faiths view such things such as murder, theft, and lying as bad or evil.

God is also revealed in nature, from the beauty of the sunset and the stars at night to the wonderful and specific design of our bodies and the planet we live on. If you saw my posts from Philmont the week before last, you would certainly know that I was able to experience God's handiwork in both the flora and fauna. We also see this from the Psalms, where David wrote (Ps 19:1:

*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above
proclaims his handiwork.*

Specific Revelation

But general revelation can only go so far, it can only preach the Law – that which God demands us to do or prohibits us from doing. Only God's specific revelation contains the Gospel – the Good News referenced in

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verses 17-18 – the news of what Christ has done for you, for me, and indeed for the entire world – kept the law that we could not, paid the penalty for our disobedience, and restored the relationship with our Creator that was broken by Adam and Eve.

While at Philmont, one of the sessions I attended, along with a couple of conservatives Jews, was a presentation on Zoroastrianism, given by an ethnic Persian from Singapore whose family had passed through India for several generations. The Jews were amazed at how some of the ceremonial aspects of Zoroastrianism lined up with Judaism, and kept saying how Zoroastrianism must have influenced Judaism. As one who understands that it was God who revealed His eternal truth to us, I wasn't surprised because God's truth is God's truth, wherever you may find it, despite questions who is considered to be the nominal author or receiver of the truth.

Lutherans affirm that the Bible does not merely contain the word of God, but that every word of it is, because of plenary, verbal inspiration, the direct, immediate word of God. Not all in the Judeo-Christian tradition share this view, such as my Jewish friends in the presentation.

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Theological Disagreement

Even among those who believe this, there are often disagreements over interpretations or translations and the place of tradition.

We see in the New Testament a division within the Jewish community, between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees insisted on a literal interpretation of the text of Scripture; the Pharisees, on the other hand, gave oral tradition equal authority to the written Word of God.

We also see the division between the Jews and the Gentiles – those to whom God had initially revealed his truth to and those who were included later, as we heard in the opening verses of today's Epistle.

The place of tradition continues to be a point of division within the people of God, with Protestants lining up with the Sadducees in looking at *Sola Scriptura*, against the Roman and Orthodox, who, like the Pharisees, put tradition on par with Scripture.

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We are, however, united in our view of Jesus, the central figure of Scripture. Whether explicitly or implicitly, we share the truths about Jesus as contained in the creeds. We believe that there was indeed a real Jesus, born of a virgin, who grew up, had a career as a craftsman, gave that up and become an itinerant rabbi, was put to death by those in power, and was raised from the dead on the 3rd day. We believe that He was both God and Man in one person, a member of the Trinity, one God in three persons. We affirm that it is only because of His actions for you and for me that our sins have been forgiven.

This contrasts with those who preach a different Gospel, who DO NOT acknowledge the Christ of Scripture, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, who teach a created of Christ or the Latter-Day Saints, who preach a Jesus who was once mortal but transcended into a God (of at least this planet).

In all of this, we must humbly acknowledge that we are NOT God – our disagreements should drive us back to the Scriptures, to do our best to understand the truth that God has revealed to us, in language and description that our limited minds we can comprehend.

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Why?

Because we are created and NOT the creator, we cannot fully know the mind of God this side of Heaven. We will know on the other side, as St. Paul did write to the Corinthians saying (1 Cor 13:12):

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; **then I shall know fully**, even as I have been fully known.*

Before that happens, we can rejoice in knowing that because of the shed blood of Jesus, the sins of both Jew and Gentile alike have been forgiven and that together we have been adopted into God's eternal family and have been joined together into a holy temple for the Lord.

AMEN