

“Everyone Has Doctrine”

1 Tim. 1:5-17

Last week, I mentioned that Paul has been criticized for not specifically condemning slavery when he writes to the slave owner Philemon concerning his runaway slave Onesimus. Clearly, those critics did not read his letter to Timothy. When Paul speaks of the ungodly, unholy, profane sinners, he lists those who enslave others alongside the murderers and the sexually immoral.

He says it is contrary to sound doctrine. The word “doctrine” has been criticized in our modern culture. Doctrine simply means teaching. The truth of the Gospel is doctrine. Proclaiming that Jesus died on the cross to pay for the guilt of your sin is doctrine. Don’t let anyone tell you that you don’t need “doctrine.” Scripture repeatedly warns that adding to or taking away from the truth of God’s Word means that you no longer have the truth of God’s Word. You have a gospel that is not the Gospel. Luther is quick to point out that false teaching is breaking the 2nd Commandment because you are using God’s good name to tell a lie. False teachers always say, “Thus says the Lord,” even though he did not say, “Thus.” Satan was the first one to ever ask, “Did God really say that?” He wants you to have bad doctrine.

In the movie “Forrest Gump,” Lt. Dan, who lost his legs in Vietnam, angrily asks Forrest Gump, “Have you found Jesus yet?” Forrest Gump

replies, “I didn’t know I was supposed to be looking for him, sir.” (That is my favorite line in the whole movie). Then Lt. Dan says that down at the VA they had a priest talk to him and he said, “God is listening, but I have to help myself. Now if I accept Jesus into my heart, I will get to walk beside him in the kingdom of heaven.”

Lt. Dan is not impressed with this kind of “Jesus talk,” nor should he be. Ultimately, he is not impressed because Lt. Dan is just like the apostle Paul describes himself before his conversion. He is a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent who is acting ignorantly in unbelief [1 Tim. 1:13]. Lt. Dan had no desire to “find Jesus.” And Forrest Gump speaks the truth that he didn’t know we were supposed to go looking for him. Lost sheep do not go out looking for the shepherd. Lost coins do not find their owner.

The Lord could not make it more clear than through the words of Ezekiel: “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. . . I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered . . . I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak . . . I will rescue my flock . . . And I, the Lord, will be there God . . . I am the Lord; I have spoken.

What part of coming to faith or “finding Jesus” is your work? God is pretty clear in saying, “I am going to do this for you,” thus says the Lord. Martin Luther rightly says in his catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him.

But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

Not only is your entrance into God’s kingdom of grace the work of the Holy Spirit (typically done through the Word of God joined with the waters of Baptism. Now, there are some who come to faith hearing the Word of God and then are baptized). Regardless, it is God creating this faith and welcoming you into His family of the church. But you staying here in His church on earth; you continuing to look forward to His church triumphant; you trusting that you, like Lt. Dan was promised, will “walk beside Jesus in the kingdom of heaven”; this is God’s work in you also. Faith is something you passively receive. Lost sheep do not go looking for the shepherd. Lost sheep do not guide the shepherd back home. Lost sheep do not influence or convince the shepherd to rescue them or give them protection. The Shepherd does this in faithful devotion for His sheep.

Last week, we heard Jesus say that you cannot be His disciple, His follower, His sheep, unless you hate your father and mother, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and even your own life. Remember that “hate” in Greek and Hebrew is not about emotion. It is a comparative word. It is distancing yourself or rejecting something, or recognizing a lack of value (compared to an item of great value). Read the words of “A Mighty Fortress” – goods, fame, child, and wife; though these all be gone . . .” We rejoice in the victory in Christ, which is far greater. Jesus says, “Rejoice with Me, for I have found the lost sheep . . . Rejoice with Me, for I have found the lost coin.” The angels in heaven

rejoice before God over every sinner who is brought to repentance and faith. There is joy around the throne of God on account of you.

Lt. Dan hated God because he placed more value on the legs he lost in the war, and he was angry that Forrest didn't leave him to die. A member of his family had fought and died in every war that America had ever fought. He believed that it was his task to die to save others. He is calling in airstrikes on the very ground on which he is shedding his blood so that what remained of his unit could live. But instead, Forrest rescues him.

Lt. Dan is angry at Forrest. He is angry at God. Lt. Dan lived for years in this anger and frustration toward God because he had learned bad doctrine. Lt. Dan was convinced that there was nothing beyond this life and it was his job to die so that he might live forever in the memory of his family – just like all of his ancestors lived on in his memory. There is only One who has shed His blood and died so that we live on forever. And we don't just live on forever in the memory of our children. How disappointing would that be?

Our world is filled with much anger and frustration toward God, because our world is filled with bad doctrine. Everyone has doctrine. Everyone has something they believe. Make sure that what you believe is not adding to or subtracting from the truth of God's Word.

The Good Shepherd has laid down His life for His sheep and has taken it up again. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. That is good doctrine. Amen.