

“Post-Modern Watchmen Need Not Apply”

Ezekiel 33:7-20

Last Sunday during our Bible Class, someone said they had a “quick” question before we began our regularly scheduled discussion. That was at 9:15. At about 10:05, I had to cut short our “quick” discussion, because it was almost time for church, and I barely got dressed by 10:15. The question had to do with the events involving the prayer service in Newtown, CT.

In my newsletter article for March, I address this at length and gave my humble opinion on what should have been done or could have been done better in regard to this difficult and painful time. If you have any concerns over the news of the day or what happened, I encourage you to read my article and I give several internet links where you can read the letters that were exchanged from President Harrison and the pastor in Newtown.

The question that arose on Sunday was concerning Unionism and Syncretism in general. Oh, those are such big scary words. Briefly, the most common example of Unionism is pastors participating together in a joint worship event with Christians from other church bodies who deny basic truths of Scripture (or pastors or laity

participating at the Lord's Table with those who deny basic truths of Scripture – especially the real presence of Christ in, with, and under the form of bread and wine.) Syncretism is similar participation with people who are not Christian. On February 15, Jonathan Fisk gave an excellent explanation of this on www.worldvieweverlasting.com – and there is a link to that in the newsletter article also.

The question that arose had to do with other times that we gather with Christians of other denominations. Can we pray with them? Can we attend a National Memorial Service at Arlington Cemetery or here in Quincy? The answer is emphatically “Yes.” You praying with your Roman Catholic or Baptist friends and neighbors is not a problem. We do not deny that they are fellow Christians who call upon the same God. However, if I would lead that service along with the clergy from those churches, then that would be a problem for me. My presence there would be stating that we have a oneness of faith and teaching. I would be giving my benediction, my blessing to their doctrine. And since I cannot hold two teachings to be the truth when they oppose one another, if I give my blessing to the teaching of a church that denies the truth of Scripture, then I have denied the truth of Scripture.

This was the problem at the “worship-ish” event that took place in Newtown with the Muslim and B’hai clergy among others offering their words without hope in Christ and the LCMS pastor speaking His benediction at the end. This is a difficult and painful topic because

there is nothing that we desire more than true unity and oneness of faith with all people – that everyone believes the Word of God and receives the joy of the Gospel and the hope of the resurrection in Christ. Anything else leaves you lost and without hope.

I know that I have covered this before, but it cannot be stated often enough, because when this question of Unionism and Syncretism arises, the media and the greater culture want to blame the LCMS for being the problem. Yet, we have offered full fellowship to every church body that adheres to 5 basic teachings:

1: God is Triune. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we can't forget in this equation that the Son of God is both True God and True Man.

2. The Bible is divinely inspired and contains no errors. It is the source and norm of truth. And truth is absolute. God is not a Post-Modernist. If His Word is true for you, it is true for me also. I can't pick and choose which parts I like and don't like.

3. Baptism cleanses us from both original sin and our sins of thought, word, and deed. The Word of God is joined with that water and our Old Adam is drowned in the water and the Word. We are raised to a new life in Christ – who is the Word made flesh. And Baptism is necessary for salvation: “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved” – with the understanding that it is the despisal of, not the lack of, Baptism that condemns you: “He that does not believe shall

be condemned.” [Mk. 16:16]. On Baptism, the Bible is very clear, “Baptism now saves you” [1 Pt. 3:21] and “This promise is for you and your children” [Acts 2:39].

4. The Body and Blood of Christ are present in, with, and under the form of bread and wine. Through a miraculous sacramental union, when Jesus says, “This is my body” we believe it – just like the early Christians all held this belief. The churches planted by Paul and the other apostles all taught that Christ is really present in flesh and blood. I can’t explain it. It is a mystery. It is a miracle. But to deny this is to say that all the apostles taught all of the first century Christians the wrong thing, and God allowed His church to wallow in ignorance of the truth until the 16th Century when, finally, the Reformed enthusiasts like Calvin and Zwingli and Arminius finally discovered the truth that Jesus is only symbolically present. We hold to Jesus words, “This is My body.”

5. There is no path to salvation apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus. “We are saved by grace through faith, it is a gift from God, apart from works, so that no one may boast” [Eph. 2:8-9].

Faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone. This is what we believe. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is far from perfect or pure. And true unity “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” is certainly our great hope. And we welcome full fellowship with any person or church that will teach and confess these five basic principles

found in Scripture. However, God is not a post-modernist. Two opposing views cannot both be true.

And for this, we are called “hateful.” President Harrison has been called “hateful.” What is truly hateful is when those who practice Unionism demand that we join their practice. They say, “You must deny what you believe, or at least look the other way, or we will call you hateful and un-Christ-like.”

I look to the clear teachings of God’s Word, and I am not comfortable giving up any of those five basic teachings of Christ’s church. To look the other way, or say they don’t matter, would be to deny Christ, because truth about Christ is present in all five teachings. They are all important.

This is what God meant when He charged Ezekiel with being a watchman for the house of Israel. The watchman standing on the wall of Jerusalem would not look out and say, “It’s only a small army attacking. Just keep doing what you are doing. Don’t worry about them. Pretend they aren’t a problem. We don’t want to upset the women and children.” He would be a very poor watchman.

Unfortunately, Satan has never let God’s church find peace and rest. The critics of God have always said, “The way of the Lord is not just” [Eze. 33:17]. Our task is to remain watchful for danger and watchful for the coming of Christ. Spiritual danger is all around us:

temptations, false teachings, enough physical comforts to entice us to let down our guard.

This is why we can never give up the basic teachings of Scripture. If God's Word is not truth, if Christ is not present in the Sacraments, if we are saved in any way by our works rather than Christ alone, then we are lost, and where do we place our hope?

Our hope is in Christ, the Son of God, who came in the flesh to be that one, final Lamb of sacrifice for the guilt of your sin and mine; who comes to us in His Word; who comes to us in the sacraments He instituted; who offered His broken body and shed blood on Calvary; who rose on Easter morning and opened the gates of heaven for you and me.

It saddens me that we are called hateful for teaching that this the one and only truth, then again, we are reminded, as Jesus said, "If they hate you, remember they hated me first." No matter what anyone says, be watchful; remain in Christ, and you will never be lost or without hope. Amen.