

## Distinctly Lutheran

We are distinctly Lutheran as set off from other Christian denominations. In this study we briefly consider the ways in which we are truly 'Lutheran'. Above all we should remember that we are Evangelical Lutheran. First and foremost we are evangelical in the true meaning of that word – Gospel Preaching. This means we are Christian. We then distinguish ourselves further from other Christians by calling ourselves 'Lutheran' due to the Lutheran Reformation out of which our church was born. Then we further distinguish ourselves from other Lutherans by calling ourselves the CLC or by any other of the names of our sister churches.

Always we have to guard against the danger that we will take pride in being Lutheran. Our pride is in the Christ and His Gospel. Rom. 1:16 We say that every Bible teaching is a Lutheran teaching, and every Lutheran teaching is a Bible teaching. As we teach the Word of God in its truth and purity, satan has set a variety of traps for us. Some of these we look at briefly.

- Meanspiritedness or Haughtiness – Because we teach the Word without addition or deletion, due to our proud sinful flesh we can easily look down our noses at other Christians. Jesus taught against this hypocrisy when He attacked Phariseeism. Haughtiness is incompatible with the humility of Christ.
- Negativism – Spending so much time pointing out the errors we have to combat we can easily become very negative. And this can be conveyed to others as they hear us. We must state clearly what we stand for above all, and then point up where we differ from other Christians.
- Shallowness – In viewing our churches as we fellowship together we can become shortsighted and not see how God is working through all Christians.
- Lack of Mission Zeal – As we combat errors, it is easy to consume our time in this to the disadvantage of reaching out. We can also get so protective that we fail to see how we should be going to the unconverted.
- Conveying to Others Wrong Ideas – Some could think that we consider there is no salvation outside of our church. But the fact is there is no salvation outside the Christian church, and we are only part of it. As we work among ourselves, we can give the idea that other churches and denominations have nothing for us to learn. This is of course false. We can learn a great deal from others. God's Spirit works through the Word wherever He wills.
- Failure to Expose and Correct our own Shortcomings – This so easily comes with pride. We are sinners saved by the grace of God and need the law to show us our sin as well as any.
- Rigidity in Practice or Rigorism – In not learning from others we can become rather bound by our own practices. But where Scripture does not speak the Lord gives us freedom to do according to our sanctified wisdom or common sense.

May God preserve us from the devil's traps. Going through the several parts of this study on being Distinctly Lutheran, may God grant us the wisdom to maintain our teachings and practices in

accordance with His Word. And may our joy be made complete as we follow Him.

## **Distinctly Lutheran**

### **We are in the Word**

At the time of the Lutheran Reformation, one of the Catholic princes asked his theologian, "You mean the Lutherans are in the Word and we are not?!" It was true then and still is today for us. While this is a self-evident thing for us, so many churches have teachings based on reason, tradition, misinterpretation of Scripture.

- We preach the whole counsel of God. Acts 20:27 It is so easy to listen to men and try to please them. But our joyful duty is to please our God who has saved us in time for eternity.
- We have the 'high view' of Scripture. Again, something that is so self-evident to us has been lost to many. They pick and choose what in the Bible they 'want' to believe. We know that no jot or tittle of the Word is to be changed. Matt. 5:18-19 Our regard is for every word no matter how small. All Scripture is inspired and therefore for our use. II Tim. 3:16
- We preach Christ as the heart and center of the church and our life. All radiates from Him as the spokes of a wheel go out from the hub. Christ is the hub for us. Jn. 5:39, I Cor. 1:30 A variety of churches have become man centered. Our attention is first on the Christ, who then directs us to love our neighbor, by love to serve one another. When churches become man-centered, they lose the message and dither about.
- We go as far as the Word and no further. Some churches because they are under God's direction, they reason, they can expand on the clear Word. Not so. For instance in regard to the position of women, we say they must be subject to man in the church, I Tim. 2:11-12 and to the husband in the home, Eph. 5:24. Yet in politics and business, since God has not spoken we can have our own views, which may vary. Or think of prohibition of drinking any liquor. Some churches teach this, though it is beyond Scripture. The Lord Himself changed water to wine at the wedding at Cana. Jn. 2:1-11 Paul encourages Timothy to drink some wine. I Tim. 5:23. We do not make up new laws beyond the will of God as revealed in the Bible.
- We let the Word explain itself. The Bible is the only book in the world that explains itself. It is of course the Spirit who explains the Word through the Word. As Peter writes the Word is of no one's private, personal interpretation. II Pet. 1:19-21
- The Word is the master and reason and all else is servant to it.

What a joy to have the solid confidence of the Word as the base and instrument for our lives. It does not change. We change as we grow in knowledge of it.

## **Distinctly Lutheran...Fellowship**

### **We are Distinctly Lutheran in our Fellowship Practices**

At the time of the Reformation the German reformers under Luther and the Swiss reformers under Zwingli met to see if they could work together. It was found that they disagreed on one teaching, that of communion. The Lutherans taught that Christ's body and blood were in, under and with the bread and wine. The Zwinglians taught that the bread and wine only represented the body and blood. Of course I Cor. 11:27-30 presents something more there than just bread and wine. There was not agreement



between the reformers on just one teaching and so they could not join together. Luther was willing to extend the hand of love to the Zwinglians, but not the hand of fellowship, a very important differentiation.

It is no different today among us. We are to unite on the agreement on Scripture. I Cor. 1:10, Phil. 2:2 And we are to separate and not participate with those who teach differently. Mt. 7:15-20, Rom. 16:17-18 So it is that all manifestations of fellowship with Christians is within this agreement circle, while not participating with other Christians is based on not agreeing with their teachings.

- Communion – When we stand or kneel together and partake together it is a very distinct expression of unity on the Word. We cannot participate with those we do not agree with, nor give them communion.
- Prayer and Worship – It is one thing to pray for anybody and everybody. That we do. But it is quite another thing to pray with others. This would be an expression of unity. But if there is none, we might observe but definitely not participate.
- Preaching – We would be glad to preach and teach any and all. But they might not want to hear us tell them where they are wrong and being led astray. We likewise do not invite pastors and teachers of other churches outside of our fellowship to teach and preach to our people. We want our people fed alone on the wholesome pasturage of the pure Word. To allow a variety of teachers holding to error teach among us would confuse the people and bring up contradictions of the truth.
- Joint Church Work – Among our sister churches we give aid and assistance, but not to other churches. Likewise our sister churches do not seek help from those outside the fellowship, because with that help would come an intrusion to try to teach otherwise than what we teach.

We in distinctly Lutheran fashion do not compromise the Word. We neither add to it nor take from it. To water down the Word to please men would not please God. We seek to serve Christ, “not in the way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men...” Eph. 6:6-7 In order to preserve and protect the truth and to please God we practice our fellowship relation with our sister churches and separate from all those with whom we do not agree. It is to the Lord that we must answer.

## **Four Questions Pertaining to Religious Fellowship with Unorthodox People**

### **I. Ought orthodox Christians to take part in the songs and prayers and offerings of unorthodox churches?**

No.

The Apostle Paul writes through the Holy Spirit: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned’ and avoid them.” Rom. 16: 17. “And he writes: “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” I Thess. 5:22. So it is God’s will that we avoid them that cause divisions and offenses in the Church of God by teaching doctrines contrary to the doctrine that we have learned from the Word of God. And do not the unorthodox do this very thing? Hence we are commanded to avoid them. Now, if we take part in the songs and prayers of the unorthodox churches—and who knows what manner of songs and prayers are liable to be sung and said in these churches?!—and if we contribute money for their purposes, namely, for the maintenance and extension of the unorthodox church, do we then avoid them? Yes, do we not assume an appearance of evil, do we not appear to be in accord with them in the main, Do we not thus confirm the unorthodox in their error, and do we not give offense to such orthodox Christians as are weak, do we not thus betray these Christians into believing that there is no real and radical difference between the churches?

“But,” I hear some one rejoin, “it does not look well to sit there like a dummy and neither sing nor pray nor drop anything into the contribution basket. It looks stiff, to say the least.” So it does. But why do



you go there? Why don't you stay away?

Oh, we do not mean to say that it is wrong to go to an unorthodox church now and then in order to see what such churches are like. But he that does go there, it behooves him to show that he does not belong to such churches. And to attend unorthodox services often, even habitually, this is wrong indeed, and it is done by such persons only as are not settled in their faith in the pure doctrine and it makes them more unsettled still.

**2. May an orthodox minister preach in an unorthodox church?**

If every appearance of his being the brother and substitute of the unorthodox pastor be abstained from, and if the latter in no wise officiate at the services, he may do so, if requested, in order to bear witness to the truth.

However, he must be careful lest orthodox Christians, and especially his own Church, take offense at such action. If there is any danger of such a thing, the idea must be abandoned.

**3. May an orthodox Christian, when the guest of such as are not orthodox, join in the latter's prayers before and after meat?**

While these are saying grace or giving thanks let him offer up a silent prayer on his own behalf. If they pray in a manner not in keeping with the Christian faith, let him utter his dissent.

Let us make the question more comprehensive, thus: **May an orthodox Christian in any case unite in prayer with such as are unorthodox?**

We reply: **By no means.**

Full well do we know, and we thank God for the fact, that there is a communion of saints which embraces both orthodox and unorthodox Christians and unites them, in humble and penitent faith in Jesus Christ, into one family of children of God. But in its outward appearing and works the orthodox Church is rigidly separate from the unorthodox. And so God wills it should be. "Avoid them." Rom. 16: 17

But what is uniting in prayer, what is fellowship therein, and what should it be according to the will of God? A glance at the golden altar of incense will tell you. As on the golden altar of incense a multitude of living coals were heaped together in one and the selfsame fire, so a multitude of poor and penitent hearts, sanctified by the blood of Christ, shall unite in one and the selfsame faith of one and the selfsame Word of grace and of God, and shall offer up one and the selfsame incense-offering of supplication, prayer, intercession, and giving of thanks, unto the common Father. Can this be done by such as are **not** at one in the faith, **not** at one in the Word of grace and of God? Will God have **strange fire**, which was not taken from the one altar that stands before God., Lev. 16:12, and **strange** incense, which God has not commanded? Will God have this put upon the fire and incense which God has sanctified by the offering of Jesus Christ and by His word? Ah, no. Read Lev. 10: 1-2, and Exod. 30:9 and give them a New Testament interpretation.....

**4. Is it right for orthodox people to accept money from such as are not orthodox for the maintenance of the Church and for the extension of God's Kingdom?**

It is not right to solicit money from such people for said purposes. But if they offer the money of their own accord, and without sinister motives, it may be accepted.

To solicit money, or let us say, to beg for money among unorthodox people for the purpose of building a church, or of raising the pastor's salary, or of providing for the Church's poor, or for its home or foreign missions—that certainly is displeasing to God, yes, it is a downright disgrace. The popish church, which claims to be orthodox, does this every day of the year. Shall we, who really are orthodox, shall we walk in her footsteps? The various sects do this thing, too. Far be it from us so to do! In obedience to the will of God, we avoid the unorthodox in everything that pertains to their churches. And when they ask us for money to help them build their churches, to help them raise their pastors' salaries, to help them provide for their poor and pay their missionaries, we tell them: We cannot do such a thing. And now **we** should ask **them**: Please give us some money so we can build our church, so we can raise our pastor's salary, so we can provide for our poor and pay our missionaries!



Shame on us unprincipled beggars! Paul's injunction to the Thessalonians finds application here: "As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing," (or: "of no man," as it says in a marginal reading; that is, that ye may have need of no man's aid). I Thess. 4: 9-12. In cases where aid really is needed, however, let us call on our brethren.

It sometimes happens that unorthodox people do, quite of their own accord, offer an orthodox Church a sum of money. It is hard telling what their motive is in so doing. Perhaps they have been impressed by the manifest sincerity of the people in the Church; perhaps the provision made for the Christian training of the children in the parish school has moved them. In such cases the money may be accepted with thanks. But it also happens that money is offered from other motives, which later on come to light in a most disagreeable manner.

(Taken from Questions on Christian Topics, by Carl Manthey-Zorn)

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#### Clear Differences between Us and other Christian Churches

In connection with the sacraments we differ.

- The Roman Catholic church taught that there were seven sacraments. They said that beside baptism and communion there was marriage. Of course God did set up marriage, though it is for all universally and does not bestow forgiveness. The RC also said that confirmation was a sacrament, though this was set up by men.
- Reformed churches in the Reformation times searched the Scriptures just as we did but came up with no sacraments. They used reason to rule over Scripture or to interpret Scripture.
- In the Lutheran Reformation the reformers dug back into the Word to find out what it is that we call a sacrament. They saw from the Bible that there were four qualifications or requirements that make something a sacrament: 1) It had to be set up or instituted by Christ – baptism, Mt. 28:19, communion, I Cor. 11:23-26, 2) The Word had to be used, 3) There were earthly elements used – water/ baptism, bread and wine/communion, 4) It assures us of forgiveness of sins. The decision that there are only two things that meet these qualifications was arrived at from the Word.

In connection with justification the Lutherans teach it correctly from the passages that say all men's sins are forgiven and that this gift has to be accepted by faith. Some go to one extreme away from the clear Word and say that not all men's sins have been forgiven. Others go to another extreme and say that it is not by faith that this comes to us.

- Universal Justification is clearly taught in II Cor. 5:19 and I Jn. 2:2 among many other passages. All men have been forgiven in Christ. But this is of no value to them unless they believe it.
- Individual Justification is clearly taught in Eph. 2:8-9 and in Rom. 5:1-2 among many other passages. It is by faith created by God Himself that we receive the forgiveness won by Christ on Calvary.

In connection with Law and Gospel there is much confusion among Christian churches. Some make of the Christian faith a new law to be obeyed. Others make of Christianity just another religion bypassing the Gospel altogether. Christianity is not just a new set of laws. In Rom. 6:23 we see clearly the law and the Gospel. Law – the wages of sin is death. Gospel – the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Some Christians try to obtain results by the law while it is the Gospel that is the power that transforms and impels. Some do not point up the sin of people so as not to offend them. But the people need to hear of their sin through the law that they might see the need of the Savior from sin in the Gospel. We Lutherans clearly differentiate between these two great teachings of the Word and how to use them. In the church's purpose we still maintain the Bible position, while so many have made of the church a mere social organization, or a community of people who have lost their last day and heaven direction. We do not preach the social gospel but the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is first of all spiritual that bears fruit. We bring the way to heaven to people, that is Jesus. So many churches have opted to make this a better earth and leave off about heaven, or downgrade this emphasis. But the Bible's emphasis is Heaven.

Some churches have opted to get involved in politics. That is not the purpose of the church either. Individuals may well get involved, but not the church. We have to much work to do to get out the message of life eternal in Jesus to unbelievers and to bolster those who believe with the truth of the Word. Jesus gives us an overriding caution in His High Priestly prayer in Jn. 17:14-18 about being in the world but not of it. Paul encourages us not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Rom. 12:1-2

In our outreach we follow the simple message of Jesus to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. For children we baptize and teach. For adults we teach and baptize. It is never one without the other. We are willing to use the gifts God has given us to communicate the Word. We do not compromise God's truth though through the use of incorrect methods or means to reach people. Paul's words are important as a compass. I Thess. 2:3-6, II Cor. 4:2-5

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### **We Find Ourselves Opposed to Various Groupings of Christians**

It is the devil who has sown the seeds of error among Christians, even hoodwinking the largest Christian denomination, the Roman Catholic church, to teach and practice at variance to the Word. We only look briefly at groupings whose teachings depart from the truth, while we must hold to the truth and depart from these groupings of Christians.

- We find ourselves opposed to the Roman Catholic Church. One very easy way to see why they have departed from the truth of the Word is to note how they base their teachings not alone on the Word, but upon the Word and four other bases: 1) tradition, 2) the Apocrypha (intertestament books), 3) papal decrees, 4) church council decisions. Jesus says the Word is truth. Jn. 17:17 To use other writings is not correct. There was even a parallel in Jesus day when the Pharisees used the traditions of their religions leaders as a basis for teaching. The Lord said they taught for doctrines the commandments of men. Mk. 7:7 So it is also with the RC.
- We find ourselves opposed to Fundamentalists. These Christians say that to join together there must be agreement on ten doctrines or on some other list. We say they limit this, while Scripture does not. Paul taught the whole counsel. Acts 20:27 In I Cor. 1:10 and Phil. 2:2 there is no such limitations.
- We find ourselves opposed to the Pentecostalist/Charismatics. They claim that miracles can still be done through men, as it was through the first apostles. But the miracles accompanied the giving of the Word as a testimony confirming the Word of God as such. Mk. 16:20, Heb. 2:3-4 We now have the complete Word of God. Also in the most thorough presentation of the work of the Holy Spirit in Scripture, which is in Jn. 14-16, there is no mention of miraculous gifts promised. Instead it is the Word that is the focus.
- We find ourselves opposed to Calvinists. They teach for instance a double predestination by

God of people, some to heaven and some to hell. This is not taught in the Bible. In the clearest teaching on predestination or election to heaven in Eph. 1:3-7 there is no hint of any predestination to hell, nor is it taught anywhere else in the Word.

- We find ourselves opposed to Arminians. They teach a decision theology, that man can chose God or make his own decision. But we are dead in trespasses and sins and it is God who must make us alive in Him. Eph. 2:1 It is the Lord who draws men to himself.

Very briefly then we can see that with these groupings our Lutheran teachings are distinctly different and drawn alone from Scripture. There are far more that we are opposed to among these groupings, but the above is for illustration briefly. But because we are opposed to them due to their teachings does not mean that they are not Christians. When we look for instance at the seven churches of Asia Minor in Rev. 2-3 we see that some of the congregations do teach wrong or tolerate false teachings. Yet God refers to these seven all as churches. And they typify in a variety of ways how the visible churches were then and are today. We must of course each answer for ourselves to God as to belonging to an orthodox teaching church. We praise God that at this time he allows our fellowship to be such a true teaching church of sinners saved by the grace of God.