

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, October 12, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 288, 283, 234, 286, 49.

Lessons: Genesis 3: 1- 15, 2 Corinthians 11:1-15, Matthew 7:15-27.

Sermon Text: 1 John 4: 1-6.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When a parent tells us “do not” do something, there is usually a good reason for that warning. When our heavenly Father tells us “do not” in Scripture, we must carefully take note. God never issues idle warnings, but he is serious about such warnings. When God says “do not” it is a matter of eternal life or eternal death. Today God warns us to carefully test what we hear. There is a great difference between

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR

1. ***“Test the spirits” to see whether they are from God.***
2. **How we are to test the spirits.**

Last Sunday you heard that ***“Those who obey [God’s] commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.”*** (1 John 3:24) The Spirit he gave us is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. It is that Holy Spirit who caused all Scriptures to be written for our learning.

God warns us: ***“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”***

How do you recognize lies? You must first know the truth. Perhaps you have seen a television commercial which makes the point that just because you “read it on the internet” doesn’t mean it is true. Even if some celebrity or famous person says something, that doesn’t necessarily mean it is true.

How often doesn’t some kind of scam or fraud involve some idea which pretends to be genuine? And how often aren’t we deceived by something that isn’t genuine but it appears to be! Even in worldly matters we must distinguish between truth and lies.

Today we have a warning, which is essential, not just to your bank account or your earthly health. Here is something essential for your eternal welfare, infinitely longer than you will live on earth! ***“This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”***

In some ways it is getting to be clearer and clearer which churches are truly straying from the truth of God’s Word. But in order to recognize that, you must really know the truth. And the truth comes from, the truth is found in, the truth is the Word of God. Avoid the lies, John says, and follow the truth. We read in John’s Gospel: ***“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.””*** (John 8:31-32) Jesus told Pilate ***“I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”*** (John 18:37) Jesus told his disciples ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** (John 14:6-7)

Once upon a time, many Lutherans used to think that if a church had the name “Lutheran” it could be considered to be a pretty correct-teaching church, that you could learn the truth about Jesus Christ in that church. That is no longer true. Not every Lutheran church teaches the truth about God. And we must certainly

be aware that not every church which people think of as “Christian” teaches the truth of God. Churches change their teachings, often to agree with what people want to hear.

Even a writer in TIME magazine commented that the Roman Catholic Church shouldn't change its moral teachings, even if the Pope might seem to be growing soft about some of them. She wrote “The mainline Protestant churches have all tried ... throwing out the unwanted baby of the traditional moral code with the theological bathwater. Yet they're still drowning.” (TIME, October 7, 2013, p. 22) Are people really benefitting when churches change their moral teachings to match what people are saying they want churches to teach? No! God warns us: *"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."* (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Our text plainly says *"Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God."* You probably would know that instantly, if what you heard and had to evaluate were said in such plain language. If someone told you that they didn't believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, you would immediately know that person is a false teacher, even if he or she isn't really in a position of being a “teacher”.

But do you remember how deceptive Satan and his allies really are? Do you remember the third sentence that came from Satan? He first asked, as you heard in our Old Testament lesson, *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"* Well, the woman answered: *"We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"* Apart from the idea that she added to what the Lord God said, the very next words of Satan are an outright lie. *"'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman."* Then came the words I want to emphasize: *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* (Genesis 3:1-5) The deception sounded great! Who wouldn't want to be like God? Who wouldn't want to know more? Who wouldn't want his eyes opened? Well, Eve's eyes were opened in a most horrible way. Until this moment Eve had known only good. There was nothing evil, nothing bad in the life of man yet, for Scripture tells us six times that what God had created was good, and concludes with *"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."* (Genesis 1:31)

Those who deny *"that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh"* reflect the spirit of antichrist. They are against Christ. They are not believers in Jesus as their only Savior from all their sins. When John first wrote these words, these comments were directed toward the false teachers who compromised the unique role of Jesus Christ as true God and true man. To deny that would immediately place your position outside the Christian faith. But this simple doctrinal test is not sufficient in every situation. We must carefully examine what they say and test everything.

It is not just doctrine, but also practice, it is not just teaching, but also what you do that shows that you are a Christian. Although we cannot see into someone's heart, we can see their deeds and examine their words, their confession.

We must examine what a church is teaching and whether or not the Holy Scriptures are the foundation and content of their doctrine. In John's day it was pretty easy to examine what a person or a church or a teacher said and determine that it was in agreement with the Scriptures. *"Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God."* If someone didn't acknowledge Jesus to be the very Son of God, such a one was to be avoided. Don't listen to them! Jesus warns us sharply to *"'Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."* (Matthew 7:15) In our epistle lesson you heard Paul tell us *"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

Scripture, the very Word of God, still has to be the fundamental touchstone of what is right and wrong, of what is truth and what is lies. And Scripture, the Bible is the Word of God in its entirety from Genesis to Revelation. It is a false teaching for a church to merely say “the Bible contains the Word of God. If they say that, what else are they saying the Bible contains? Myths? Fables? Fiction? Yes, that is what they are saying!

We can know from their confessions and from their sermons that many churches do not believe that Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, came into the flesh to save sinful mankind from all their sins. Perhaps you have even heard a funeral sermon which did not teach that fundamental truth from Scripture!

You have to know the truth to pick out the lies! Why do we have Catechism Instruction for our young people and Adult Instruction for adults who want to know what our church teaches and believes?

Haven't you learned the truth about Jesus Christ? Think about the words you confess in the Apostles Creed.

Of course, we know that Satan has gotten even more sneaky since that first temptation tripped up Eve and Adam. That has led to the need for confessions. The Apostolic Creed is so very brief, but has so much in it! It just grew as a confession used by believers in the true God. But by 325 A.D. there was need of a greater, more specific confession of faith, and Christians developed and carefully worded the Nicene Creed. But 125 years later, there was need for even more, and the Athanasian Creed was written by Christians. And the contents of those three creeds are essential and fundamental to true Christianity. The Athanasian Creed ends with the words that this is the universal, Christian faith, "which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved"!

But Satan didn't stop deceiving mankind. He is continuing to this very day. Thus it was necessary for Christians after Martin Luther had died, to draw up and agree upon even more detailed confessions of faith, including the Augsburg Confession, the Formula of Concord, and four other confessions. And, of course, Satan didn't stop then. Into the 20th century it has been necessary for confessing Christians to plainly set forth other doctrines of Scripture alongside other unscriptural teachings which had arisen, to clarify the Word of God as controversies arise. And it starts with confessing that Jesus Christ was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary".

Scripture plainly says "*every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.*" Could it be clearer? Jesus is the only Savior for all mankind.

Thus John could write to his first hearers: "*You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*" Jesus, after all, is the eternal Son of God, greater than any power in the world! The false teachers, John wrote, "*are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.*"

Sometimes it is very easy to discern who is speaking "*from the viewpoint of the world*" and sometimes it is difficult to recognize that. That is where it is essential to know what God says. Why do we memorize Bible passages? Why do we memorize truths from the Bible as taught in Luther's Small Catechism? The goal isn't just to memorize so you can say it to the pastor for instruction class that day. The goal is to memorize so that you can speak these truths to anyone, and especially to Satan's allies when they tempt us! How did Jesus, after all, fight off the devil? He didn't have to look up a book and chapter and verse and then read from the Bible. He recited the Bible. Of course, he was the very Son of God, and knew the Words that God had spoken and recorded for mankind. But he used the weapon of the Word of God when he fought the devil.

We can say with a confidence which comes from knowing God's Word that "*We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us.*" Could it be any clearer? "*This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.*"

We must test the Spirits and evaluate what we hear in the light of the truth of the Word of God. May God help all of us to learn, and help us, once we have learned, to remember, to teach others, and to speak out against the spirit of falsehood and for the spirit of truth! Amen.