

Almighty God, You have set Your law of love ever before us; Grant us Your grace that we may never harbor any resentment or ill-feeling in our hearts *especially against our brothers and sisters in Christ*, but seek at all times the way of reconciliation and peace, according to the teaching of Your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 112).

John said to [Jesus] "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

In Christ Jesus, our merciful Lord who has called us to lives of following Him in mercy, dear fellow redeemed:

Traditionally Lutherans do not sheep-steal from other Christian churches. Even if the sheep are following false teachers we do not seek to lure them into our flock. If they come to us because they hear the pure Gospel, we certainly welcome them. But we honor man-made boundaries. In part such practices are based on our text.

However this applies only to Christian churches, which confess the Triune God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Certainly members of false churches - Moslems, Buddhists, and Hindus are not sheep in another Christian flock. Nor are members of churches that claim to be Christian, but are clearly not, like Mormons and Jehovah Witness; they are considered prospects to whom given the chance we will reach out with the Gospel in order that they might believe and be saved.

If our neighbors are of another Christian denomination we are called upon to rejoice living at peace with them. It does not mean we ignore the fact they are being misled by false teaching. Rather we will speak the truth in love if called upon to do so. Let us review this distinction based on our Lord's instruction for His disciples and seek to **Live at Peace without Compromising Jesus' Teachings.**

I

Jesus elsewhere calls upon us to hold to His teachings, observing all that He has commanded us. He prayed for the unity of His Church. But He also warned us about false teachers. His Apostles urged Jesus' followers to be devoted to the Lord's teachings, united in thought and speech, discerning the spirits of those who come to us

in Jesus' name. Judgments are to be made by us not based on guesses in regard to inner motives or the hidden condition of the heart, but solely based on observed words and deeds.

"Judge not and you shall not be judged." Is often misquoted by those who think that false teachers and their teachings are not to be challenged, allowed to stand side by side with the truth. By God's grace we have been given the truth from our Lord, which sets us sinners free. It is not to our credit that we have it. God's truth is a gift to us, which is to be cherished and preserved. But you know as well as I that we can so easily slip into an arrogant attitude in this regard, as though God owes us His appreciation for holding to His truth.

John, speaking for the others showed such a sinful attitude when he said: "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." Jumping into condemnation mode is common for us as sinners.

Christ Jesus and His Church, you and me and all believers, are not called upon to condemn but to show mercy and forgiveness. Just as we have been liberally shown by our Lord. We are called upon to pray for one another and seek peace with all men especially the household of faith. There were not different Christian denominations in Jesus' day, so He was not addressing the exact same circumstances we face with our Baptist, Methodist, Catholic neighbors today. Yet it is applicable to us today when Jesus corrected John by saying: "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For the one who is not against us is for us."

The Apostle Paul mentions this same principle in the 2nd Corinthians of not intruding in another man's mission territory. He expected the same from those outside his mission territory. He also makes reference in his letter to the Philippians about how there were some in Rome, where he was under house arrest, who preached the Gospel in competition with him. While trusting that all ill motives will in the end be exposed by the Lord of the Church, Paul concluded by saying this: "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice."

II

Truly we should rejoice when Satan's kingdom is under assault because Christians are proclaiming the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus alone. The Gospel may be clouded with errors among them and that is a serious matter, yet we rejoice that the power of the Gospel is still at work despite the errors. Franz Pieper a well-respected early 20th American Lutheran theologian referred to many

of these *errorists* as holding to a “fortunate inconsistency”. For example, the Baptists deny infant baptism and consider baptism as the work of man, yet they will insist upon salvation by grace alone in Christ.

In keeping with our Lord’s call not to compromise His truth, the Apostle warns us at the end of the letter to the Romans: “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.” So while we are to be careful not to join in with their false teachings, thus giving a false appearance of unity, we still seek to show forth the fruits of Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. For as Jesus points out to John and the others: “whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.” We in turn should do the same for them.

That being said, do not be fooled by the statement that we can agree to disagree and unite outwardly and forget any differences we may have concerning the teachings of Christ. Beware of ever compromising the truth. The Gospel is too precious to lose. Jesus promises that having the Truth of the Gospel sets the sinner free from all personal attempts to earn salvation. All false teaching feeds the monster of uncertainty. The more it is fed, the more it separates the sinner from Christ, causing the sinner to seek certainty in the wrong place – in one’s own actions instead of in Christ’s alone.

Now perhaps you have been willing to compromise the truth with relatives and friends. You have gone beyond what is allowable in recognizing them to be Christian but have felt embarrassed and even apologized for Scriptures’ teaching. You smart under the words of Jesus: “whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Compromising the truth taught by our Lord shows a lack of love for Him.

On the other hand perhaps you have become an arrogant separatist like John and the other disciples, as they showed themselves to be in our text. We should always seek peace and rejoice with those who know and believe in Jesus even if they hold to error. Living at peace and joy with other Christians is not compromising the truth.

Whether you have been guilty in either direction, and most likely we all have at various times in our Christian lives, repenting

we should know and trust that Christ's blood has washed us clean from seeking unhealthy divisions or unions. Jesus conducted Himself with perfect obedience always seeking to unite in true unity around the truth sent down from heaven and showing mercy and forgiveness to those who err and seek reconciliation.

Jesus patiently worked with the Pharisee Nicodemus and Tax Collector Zacchaeus until they repented and believed in Him alone for salvation. What is more, look at how patiently Jesus dealt with John. Shortly after our text according to Luke's account, John joined his brother James, after Jesus was rejected by a certain Samaritan village, requesting that fire from heaven would consume that village. We are told that Jesus once again rebuked them and they went on to another village. Truly our Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love for us.

God grant us such humility to hold to and confess the truth He has given us in His word and eagerly to show forth kindness to all especially those who act in Jesus' name in their daily lives. Without ever compromising the truth, we may find many opportunities to cooperate in our shared struggles against the unbelieving world around us. Be careful how you speak about other Christians. Errors may need to be rebuked, but other Christians need from us mercy, just as we need it from them and all of us receive freely in Christ. Amen.