



Cleansed and Fed: The Sacraments Promote Good Theology

GOSPEL CERTAINTY

One friend to another...
"If you were to die tonight, would you go to heaven?"

The reply...
"I hope so!"

What reasons might the second friend give for their uncertainty?



Certainty or sinful pride?

Luke 18:9-12

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

What was the basis for the Pharisee's confidence?

Name some other false foundations for confidence before God.

Even the name "Lutheran" can become a false foundation for confidence before God. It happened in history. About one hundred years after Martin Luther died, the Lutheran church in Germany had become plagued by spiritual laziness. Two Lutheran theologians, Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), fought for a higher level of Christian piety.

Spener, Francke, and others like them encouraged things like:

- Small group Bible studies
- Personal prayers
- Lay ministry
- Christian living

Still today we enjoy some benefits that have come to us from this era of Lutheran Pietism. Can you think of examples?

In spite of the Pietists' good goals, it wasn't long before their emphasis on improving Christian behavior began to lead them away from the Bible teachings they sought to defend:

- They began measuring people's Christianity based on their level of Christian living.
- They suggested that Christians aren't *fully* Christian until they *experience* their conversion in some way.
- Baptism wasn't considered complete until a baptized person took their confirmation vow.
- The gospel was considered useful only insofar as it led people to live holier lives.

Explain: In trying to address the false confidence of their fellow Christians, Pietists introduced a new source of confidence that was equally false.

Still today the Christian church at large continues to be influenced negatively by some aspects of Pietism. Can you think of examples?

Sing or say the following hymn stanzas together.

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the eventide,
Nor let your Word, that heavenly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

O God, how sin's dread works abound!
Throughout the earth no rest is found,
And falsehood's spirit wide has spread,
And error boldly rears its head.

*Nikolaus Selnecker
Christian Worship Hymn 541, s.1,2*

Damage Report

Luke 11:46

⁴⁶ Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

Matthew 23:27-28

²⁷ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Of what is Jesus accusing the Pharisees and teachers of the law?

Why do you suppose the Pharisees and teachers of the law were teaching these things?

When we rest our confidence on our own ability to serve God...

- What kind of damage do we do to ourselves?

- What kind of collateral damage do we do to others?

Sing or say the following hymn stanzas together.

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Your holy Word and sacrament.

Lord Jesus, help, your Church uphold,
For we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold.
Oh, prosper well your Word of grace,
And spread its truth in every place.

*Nikolaus Selnecker
Christian Worship Hymn 541, s.3,4*

The Sacraments and Gospel Certainty

Matthew 11:28

[Jesus said,] “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

1 Peter 3:21

Baptism... saves you.

Matthew 26:27-28

“Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Evaluate: We should be wary of letting people become too confident of their salvation.

Your friend says, “I went to Communion today, but I still don’t feel forgiven.”
How might you respond?

Explain: In providing us the sacraments of Baptism and Communion, God gives us a source of certainty that comes from outside of ourselves.

Sing or say the following hymn stanzas together.

Oh, keep us in your Word, we pray;
The guile and rage of Satan stay!
Oh, may your mercy never cease!
Give concord, patience, courage, peace.

The cause is yours, the glory, too,
So hear us, Lord, and keep us true.
Your Word alone is our defense,
The Church’s glorious confidence.

Oh, grant that in your holy Word
We here may live and die, dear Lord,
And when our journey’s ending here,
Receive us into glory there.

*Nikolaus Selnecker
Christian Worship Hymn 541, s.5-7*