

Circuit Winkel Bible Studies

Electronically published by the LCMS Praesidium and Council of Presidents, these Circuit Winkel Bible Studies are specifically prepared for use by pastors' circuit meetings to strengthen our ties with one another and to help us grow in the Word of God.

2013-2014 Theme | WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:16(ESV)

Every teaching of God's Word ultimately leads to Christ or centers in Christ and all Christ has done and is still doing for us. As we testify of the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the words of our witness must be clear and consistent with HIS Word. Only in this way will we bring the greatest comfort to hurting people – penitent sinners.

Yet, much of the Biblical message to which we bear witness, has at various times been rejected, confused or co-opted for various human ends. People miss or willfully ignore the true goal of God's Word, the justification of the sinner before God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

When we seek to clarify the witness of God's Word, the world and even many within the church often ask, "What difference does that make?" Since we are called to testify of Christ in a manner faithful to His Word, it is critical that our witness be clear. That's why, in these studies, we will be examining what difference clarity or the lack thereof really makes with a host of Biblical teachings. The topics we'll discuss become even more urgent as these teachings are in the front lines of our witness to the lost and crucial for the strengthening of believers.

Each segment of this series makes use of a negative question so as to sharpen and focus our doctrinal teaching. The answers God's Word provides to our questions serve to give a clearer and more positive witness to the Lord Jesus Christ for all hearers, both those who have not yet believed and to those who have heard with faith and are baptized.

These studies are funded by a grant of \$200 from each LMCS district. Questions and comments may be directed to the general editor of the series, [Rev. Mark W. Love](#).

SEPTEMBER 2013 - ORIGINAL SIN –

Pastor James Blain – St. James Lutheran Church, Grand Rapids, MI

What difference would it make, if our preaching and teaching are not informed by (or if they minimize) the real nature and effect of original sin, both before and after Baptism?

If we minimize original sin or fail to see its true depravity, then Jesus may become for us merely a helper or an assistant, and our preaching and teaching will likely be dominated by self-help advice and therapy. On the other hand, if original sin is a deadness of soul that makes us complete beggars before God with nothing of our own to offer, then we need Jesus as Savior and our message must be one of deliverance from death and rescue from certain destruction.

OCTOBER 2013 - REPENTANCE AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Pastor Jonathon Krenz – Epiphany Lutheran Church, Dorr, MI

What difference would it make, *if the means of grace are not rightly taught and administered for both repentance and the forgiveness of sins?*

If repentance and the forgiveness of sins are severed, there is nothing but cheap grace. Forgiveness becomes not the forgiveness of the hearer, but an excuse of the sin so that hearer need not turn away from it. Justification of the sinner is turned into a justification of the sin. Faith becomes a feeling that God will be nice to me whatever I do. Yet real repentance and forgiveness are what bring real comfort in Christ because only a real Savior can deal with real sin.

NOVEMBER 2013 - THE HOLY TRINITY

Pastor Robert Zagore – Trinity Lutheran Church, Traverse City, MI

What difference does it make, *if our witness to God's Trinitarian nature lacks clarity and consistency?*

In his ecumenical dialogues, Herman Sasse would often press the question to any who claimed a faith in Jesus, "Great, but what do you believe about him?" This same question must be put to countless people who claim a faith in God: "What do you believe about Him?" Contemporary music frequently speaks much of God and His attributes, but often little of His Trinitarian nature and saving work. Yet there is nothing in all the universe more sure and certain than the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, put on us in our Baptism, the name by which we are saved.

DECEMBER 2013 - JESUS CHRIST –

Pastor Mitchell Otto, Coralville, IA

What difference would it make, *if our witness to the person of Jesus Christ did not center and remain on His vicarious atonement/substitutionary work for us.*

At no time in our history have so many people known the name of Jesus, yet when pressed, these many know little or nothing about Him. Sadly there are countless preachers offering any kind of Jesus one may want, but not the God-Man who suffered, died and rose in our place. In his ecumenical dialogues, Herman Sasse would often press the question to any who claimed a faith in Jesus, "Great, but what do you believe about him?" This question begs a similar question of the church, "What do you say about Him?"

JANUARY 2014 - JUSTIFICATION –

Pastor Harold Senkbeil – Doxology, Brookfield, WI

What difference would it make, *if justification by grace through faith alone is not taught as a daily reality for the believer in this or her life of sanctification?*

Justification is a word that still rings within the Lutheran church, but often it may receive only cursory acknowledgement. So many rush to the message and the work of sanctification, believing that Christians need to move beyond justification in their

spiritual evolution. For those that rush after this idea of sanctification, the preaching of justification is no longer necessary for the believer. Having been plucked out of the water and put into the boat, it's now time to start rowing. And if you happen to fall or jump back into the water, well, having been in the boat before, you should know how to get yourself back in. While this idea certainly sounds ridiculous, that doesn't stop people from holding it out as a true picture of the redeemed life.

FEBRUARY 2014 - THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS –

Reverend Richard Eyer, Milwaukee, WI

What difference would it make, if the theology of the cross is supplemented and/or supplanted with a theology of glory?

What happens when our teaching and preaching is all about living a joyful life in the Lord, but we have hearers whose lives are falling apart, who are filled with doubt, and wonder if they really belong? What about when Christians suffer? Or when people don't feel joyful, but feel angry against God? What happens when we tell people to "rejoice in the Lord" but they are bogged down with sickness and fear of death?

MARCH 2014 - THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BAPTIZED –

Pastor Michael Roth – Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Joseph, MI

What difference would it make, if the God given role and responsibilities of the "priesthood of all believers" and the "office of the Ministry" are not rightly taught?

Too often these two, the clergy and the priesthood of the baptized, are pitted and played off against each other. What happens when this takes place? Or one is exalted over the other? How do the members of the priesthood and the bearers of the office fit "hand in glove" with one another for the sake of healthy life in the Body of Christ?

APRIL 2014 - ONE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH –

Pastor William Cwirla

What difference would it make, if the Holy Christian Church is not understood here and now – as it shall be revealed then and there, at the end of time – as THE Assembly of All Believers, gathered by God's Spirit through the means of grace?

How does it affect the Gospel if the Church is seen as a voluntary association created by like-minded people? More practically speaking, how do we know our congregation really is the Church when all we see is a gathering of sinners? How is the Church one if there are all these churches? Where do we find the Church? How are the marks of the Church comforting? Why is it important to trust that Christ will bring His Church, all believers, to be gathered from every nation, tribe, people and language around the throne and the Lamb?

**MAY 2014 - THE MISSION OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD –
Reverend Randall Golter, Office of International Mission, LCMS**

So what difference would it make, if the Church in worship and in the mission field chooses not to continue confessing the teachings/doctrines it claims to believe?

In a quest to woo and win the lost for Christ, there is always the temptation to “soft-pedal” (or go silent on) those teachings and truths we are afraid will offend the world and the lost. This is not to say that those who do so necessarily reject the Scriptures and doctrines they claim to believe, but our silence on these teachings will likely skew the message for the hearers. Such silence endangers real faith because it purposely limits what the Lord has given hearers to hear that they might receive faith through that Word. When we offer such a “Word of God lite,” the question must be asked, “To what faith are we really calling people?”

CONCLUSION

In each of these areas of the church’s life and teaching, our Lord has not left us to guess what the content of our witness must be. Nor are we free to invent our own message. Our witness can only be of the Word of God rightly seen, heard and given through Jesus Christ. We testify of Christ and His Word for the eternal salvation of our hearers. God’s purpose through our witness is to bring the greatest possible comfort and assurance to broken and hurting people. Only a clear and consistent witness to the Gospel faithfully delivers the benefits of Christ to the repentant sinner.

The goal of our teaching is not simply to offer facts about God in Jesus Christ. Rather the goal of each teaching our Lord has given with such clarity and consistency is to bring Jesus Christ Himself to all who hear; so that every penitent sinner hears Jesus say, in His own words, “Your sin is forgiven you. Go in peace.”

What were the signs of the Kingdom for Jesus? “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up; and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matthew 11:4-5).

So in every area of the Church’s life and teaching, the clear, consistent and full voice of Jesus needs to be heard: “Arise. This is for you. I forgive you. I died, for you! I have risen again to prepare a place for you. I will not leave you an orphan, but I am coming back to raise also YOU!” This Word is more than information imparted, but this Word actually delivers to us Jesus and His benefits, forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.