

“Listen and Live”

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The Word of the Lord from Isaiah is pretty adamant: “Listen diligently to me ... Incline your ear ... hear.” The Lord speaks a Word and it does what it says. The Lord speaks, and there is Life!

The Lord not only commands us to listen to Him, He also gives great promises. “For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

Command and promise. Mandate and institution. The Word of the Lord and Life.

The Church of God gathered at Corinth was wracked by divisions, much like the Church today gathered under the banner of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. At this conference, and outside of it, there are many questions concerning the Lord’s Supper. We all want answers, solutions. We want unity. We want to be faithful. So listen! Listen to the Apostle Paul – listen to Jesus – listen to the Lord – for His Word does what it says.

In his day, C.F.W. Walther faced many of the same questions and divisions. In 1870, Walther presented an essay to the Western District of our synod, entitled: “Communion Fellowship with Those Who Believe Differently.”

His first thesis sets the foundation for the discussion, when he states: “The true visible church in an absolute sense, or part of the same, is that church in which the Word of God is preached purely and the Holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution.”

It seems obvious that if you have a question about the Lord’s Supper, the first thing you should do is go to the Lord’s mandate and institution – you should listen to His pure preaching on the matter, and listen to what He says about the “handing out” of His Supper. But is anyone listening?

The Apostle Paul doesn’t pretend to have a new perspective on the Lord’s mandate and institution. There were all kinds of questions about the doctrine and practice of the Lord’s Supper in Corinth. But what does the Apostle Paul say?

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.” That’s the right “administration” of the Sacrament – listening to the Lord, and doing what He says. That is what the Church does. That is what faith does. It hears and believes the Lord’s Word, for (as you well know), faith comes by hearing.

The Lord has fulfilled His covenant “for you” in Christ Jesus, His Son. His blood is the atoning sacrifice for all sin. His blood poured out at Calvary turns away God’s wrath at sin and delivers you from sin’s death. And now, as His Body and Blood is “handed out” to you, He says, “listen diligently to me.”

To those who receive what I hand out in an “unworthy manner,” I promise that my judgment is poured out on you. But to the one who receives worthily, that is, with faith in my words – I promise that my Word will not return to me empty – it will accomplish that for which I sent it.

To you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the Word of the Lord has come down from heaven (even God’s own Son, Jesus Christ), providing seed for the sower and bread for the eater, handing out “the remission of all your sins.”

So “listen diligently to [the Lord].” Incline your ear to His Word. Eat and drink, and be satisfied – for His Word promises forgiveness for all your sins. And where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation, “for you.”

This is most certainly true.