

**2 Timothy 3:16-4:15 ‘Foundations of the Faith: The Pure Doctrine of the Word’**

When you drink a glass of water, how pure do you want that water to be? How many parts per million of arsenic or lead are acceptable to you? What level of salmonella bacteria would you welcome in your eggs or hamburger? We want our water and food to be as pure as possible. We may accept that perfect purity in our water and food is an unrealistic expectation, yet it is still the goal we strive for.

In the same way that we strive for purity in our food and water, so it is important that we strive for the purest possible teaching of God’s Holy Word. St. Paul called for purity in teaching God’s Word in these words to the young pastor Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:16ff.

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,<sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:<sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.<sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not endure sound (pure) doctrine, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,<sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.<sup>5</sup> As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*

St. Paul instructed Timothy to teach the sound or ‘pure’ doctrine of

God's holy Word. Paul knew from experience how quickly false doctrine can creep into the church and how damaging false teaching is to the message of the Gospel and the fellowship of God's people. Paul prophesied of the day when people would 'not endure' pure doctrine but would follow teachers that cater to their own likings and opinions. The church has been challenged to hold firm to the pure teaching of God's holy Word since the day Christ founded it. Even after Jesus founded the church on Peter's confession of faith He had to chastise Peter's false doctrine in attempting to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. This challenge to hold to pure doctrine continues in the church this day. It is prudent that we consider the pursuit of 'pure doctrine' as another foundation of the Christian faith.

Now just what is a 'doctrine'? A doctrine is a specific teaching from God's Holy Word. A doctrine can be a very broad concept, such as "*Jesus is the Son of God.*" Or it may express a very detailed concept such as is found in delineating the communication of attributes between Jesus' divine and human natures. Whether a biblical doctrine be broad or detailed, it is important because it is revealed in God's Holy Word. Every Biblical doctrine is logically interconnected with every other biblical doctrine to reveal the truth and consistency of God's Holy Word. There can only be two types of Christian doctrine. Either a doctrine is true or it is false. True doctrine always shines a spotlight on Christ as Lord and Savior and builds up the church. False doctrine always dims the light of truth by introducing worldly concepts that detracts from Christ's work on the cross. St. Paul instructed Timothy to teach God's Word and defend against false doctrine. God calls His church to faithfully defend and proclaim the pure doctrine of His Word through the ages.

Where does the pure doctrine of the church reside? Many envision it hidden away in the pages of dusty books in pastoral libraries. Well, yes, I have dusty books that contain much information on points of doctrine. But if doctrinal truth remains hidden in books it does no one any good. The pure doctrine of the Word of God lives in the faith life of Christ's church which means that it resides in the hearts and minds of the faithful. The study of the doctrine of God's Word sharpens our minds and deepens our faith. It is a long standing practice that a person is received into membership in the fellowship of the Lutheran Church only after being instructed in the doctrines of God's Word which we confess in this fellowship. After instruction a person is welcome to confess this faith publicly stating that they personally believe what we teach, believe and confess in this fellowship. After this public confession of faith a person is received at the Lord's Table in the fellowship of the altar. The basis for our unity is our common confession of faith in the pure teachings of God's Word. The founding fathers of our Lutheran Church Missouri Synod left their homeland in German in 1836 because their government legislated that they must compromise their teaching of God's Word to conform to a mediating position. Rather than compromise they immigrated to Missouri so that they could remain faithful to the pure teachings of God's Holy Word.

As a compass points toward magnetic north, the pure doctrine of God's Word points always toward the cross of Jesus. Pure doctrine will not intermingle with any teaching that implies that man is saved by his own works, or reduces the centrality of Christ's sacrifice on the cross or reduces God's means of grace to a work of man. Pure doctrine calls sinners to repentance, offers the cleansing forgiveness of Christ through the means of His Word and Sacrament and

glorifies Jesus as the only Savior. Pure doctrine rejoices in the free gifts of God's grace given in Baptism and the Lord's Supper and rejoices to walk by faith in obedience to the will of God. Satan works to undermine the church by corrupting its doctrine, usually in some way that confuses Law and Gospel and substitutes the work of Christ on the cross with the works of man. God calls fights the good fight of faith when it defends and proclaims the pure doctrine of God's holy Word.

Doctrine that is pure and undefiled does not change with the prevailing winds of human opinion in a given age. It is preserved and revealed in the Word of God and given to the church to teach and proclaim. That is why we can still use the 500 year old Catechism from Martin Luther as the basis for doctrinal instruction. The pure doctrine of the Word of God does not change. Just as we desire to drink the purest possible water, and eat the best quality food, so we also strive for purist possible doctrine in our preaching and teaching and life of faith that the name of Jesus may be glorified among us and that people may hear this Gospel message and rejoice in God's gift of salvation.

God's holy Church strives for purity in its doctrine and practice. Pure doctrine glorifies Jesus and lifts high His cross. It is our joy to hold fast to the teachings of God's Word and glorify our Savior's name by proclaiming the pure Gospel truth of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is the truth that makes us free. Amen.