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## The Pastor and His Guide

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### **The Pastor and His Guide**

When God created Adam and Eve, He did not at once provide them with a radio set and a vacuum sweeper, but He did say to them, Subdue the world. The task of complying with that command has taxed human strength, wisdom, and resourcefulness from that day unto this. Employing processes of investigation and experimentation, man has slowly, unevenly perhaps, but nevertheless surely made remarkable progress in his struggle to subject the forces of nature to his will. If progress is to be made in the future in these matters, it must be achieved in the same laborious way. God has given to man no blue-prints which he may follow in developing the best form of government, the best economic system, the best educational methods, the most successful practise of medicine, the most helpful use of automotive power, etc. These are things in which man must find his own way by the use of reason, hard work, the trial-and-error method.

Whereas this method applied to the solution of problems associated with man's physical and temporal wants has met with amazing results, the same method applied to the solution of man's spiritual needs has invariably ended in futility and despair. Behold Buddha! Troubled in soul, looking for light and inner peace, he forsook his beautiful young wife and new-born son (if the historical or legendary accounts be true) and went forth in search of spiritual happiness. He reflected upon the lessons to be learned from the great book of nature. He tortured his mind. He fasted and suffered and in the end found only a religion of doubt and despair. When it comes to the needs of soul, man cannot help himself. True enough, he does know from the works of creation that there is a God, Rom. 1, 19, 20, and the vestiges of the Law still remaining in his heart do give him a sense of right and wrong, Rom. 2, 14, 15; but real light and certainty, peace and assurance, he is not able to discover by dint of personal effort, Eph. 4, 18;

1 Cor. 2, 14; 2 Cor. 3, 5. Crafty priests of ancient Egypt may claim possession of mysterious words of charm which are to help the soul beyond the grave; somber-looking Roman haruspices may profess to read the will of Heaven from the bloody entrails of sacrificial animals; but in reality all this is nothing more than a great and lucrative process of conscious or unconscious deception and pitiful superstition.

Equally vain and futile is the endeavor of modern man to satisfy his spiritual needs by hasty refuge to the sciences, ethics, esthetics, psychology, and philosophy. His pronouncements upon spiritual questions may have the sound of profound learning and the appearance of authoritativeness, but in the last analysis they are still merely the product of man's finite mind imprisoned in the chambers of spiritual darkness and blindness. Spiritually speaking, men by nature still walk as they did of yore: "in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart," Eph. 4, 17 f.

If all this be true, however, as it unquestionably is, it must follow that the pastor, who is to minister to men in things spiritual, cannot be guided merely by reason and human wisdom if he is to serve faithfully and successfully. This becomes possible only if God Himself comes to the rescue and gives guidance and direction. Fortunately for man, God has in mercy done just that. What eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard God has revealed unto us by His Spirit, 1 Cor. 2, 9, 10. Here God has not made man dependent upon his own ability and resourcefulness as He did in the realm of the physical; but here He has Himself provided chart, compass, and all needed specific instruction. He has given that "more sure Word of Prophecy," which is a "light that shineth in a dark place," 2 Pet. 1, 19. This is the Word which without additions or subtractions is to serve as the Christian pastor's guide, Deut. 12, 32; Gal. 1, 8. This Word must be a lamp unto his feet and a light upon his way as he performs the manifold duties of his sacred office. And beyond this there is no other authoritative guide; for if one speaks not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in him, Is. 8, 20. The testimony of the Scriptures is amply clear on this point, and theoretically this truth has been accepted by earnest Bible-teachers of both Old and New Testament times. But how much has it not been ignored by them in practise! Incredible as it may seem, it is a fact that the Bible suffered much at the hands of its interpreters, from rabbinic time on down to the Reformation.

Usually seven different periods of Bible interpretation are distinguished: the Rabbinic, the Alexandrian, the Patristic, the Scholastic, the period of the Reformation, the post-Reformation,

and the Modern period. The interpreters of the Rabbinic period attached supreme importance to the very letters of the Old Testament writings, their number, arrangement, and numerical values. Thus they taught, for instance, that the Law had 613 precepts because the numerical value of the word for incense equals 613. The Alexandrian period was characterized by the allegorical method, which despised the simple literal meaning of Holy Writ as a mere concession to the weak and the ignorant. The Patristic period was influenced largely by both the Rabbinic and allegorical methods, so that the interpretations offered by such fathers as Tertullian, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine are affected by these interpretative practises. The Scholastics, dominated by Thomas Aquinas, discovered a fourfold sense in the Scriptures: the historical, the allegorical, the anagogical, the tropological. When men dealt with God's oracles in ways such as these, it was unavoidable that many things which they presented as Scripture truths were nothing but their own peculiar ideas and views. Such pitiful confusion made it utterly impossible for those who were being instructed to know whether they were listening to God or to man. It was not until Luther's day that light and clarity came to prevail in this all-important matter. The great Reformer cut in two the Gordian knot. He swept away with one heroic effort the accumulated *débris* of human opinions and traditions. He courageously distinguished between that which the Scriptures taught and that which men had thought. He insisted upon the principle of *sola Scriptura* and together with others laid down elementary hermeneutic principles, which demanded the philological and grammatical knowledge requisite for a proper understanding of the sacred text, observance of the context and of the historical background of any given Scripture-passage or book, and the limitation of any text to its original scope and one intended meaning.

These facts are important; for they show us that, if the Bible is to be the pastor's guide, more is required than a mere parrot-like repetition of the great principle *Sola Scriptura*. If this principle is to have meaning, the conscientious pastor must in the first place be sincerely concerned about the purity and authenticity of the sacred text. This is a matter which is frequently overlooked. Worse than that, it can happen, and has happened, that earnest efforts at intelligent text criticism are decried as evidence of theological looseness and infidelity to the sacred text. It may occur that one is misunderstood and criticized by brethren when calling attention to the fact that of the various verses of the Epistle-lesson 1 John 5, 4—10 v. 7 is not found in the best manuscripts.

The text established, the pastor must in the second place devote himself earnestly to the task of ferreting out its one intended meaning. The Scriptures are not to be read in the light of what men have said about them, but what men have said and taught in the past must be read and judged in the light of the Scriptures. Impossible as it may seem, even men like Sprenger, who wrote the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*, and therewith gave rise to the unspeakable witch-burnings, and Sixtus IV, who inaugurated the gruesome Spanish Inquisition, appealed to Holy Writ in support of their murderous programs. Yes, even in Lutheran circles strange things have happened in the matter of Bible interpretation. When Count Erhard Truchsess of Wetzhausen asked the theological faculty of Wittenberg why the Lutheran Church was not engaging in mission-work in heathen lands, the faculty replied that the great mission command of Matt. 28 represented a *ius apostolicum* and applied only to the Twelve. Thus we see that, while the inspired Word of God is true and infallible, man's interpretation of that Word may be subject to his own prejudices, want of knowledge, and misconceptions. That is why each pastor, responsible before God for what he teaches and for the guidance he gives to immortal souls, must attend to the Scriptures, examine and reexamine the text, lest he complacently accept as Scriptural what is not Scriptural and still naively believe that he is following the principle of *sola Scriptura*. It was just because Luther was so firm and unyielding in his adherence to the principle of "The Bible Alone" that the influence of his teaching proved so irresistible and wrought such amazing changes so rapidly.

Perhaps it might here be said in passing that, since these are a pastor's responsibilities, it is more important for him to possess good grammars, lexica, books which approach the study of the sacred text from the linguistic and historical point of view, rather than just a collection of sermons and sermon outlines, helpful as these may be.

This principle, which imposes so great a responsibility upon the individual pastor and makes his pastoral task one of high and holy seriousness, at once, however, also liberates him from all bondage to mere human traditions and provides him with the guidance he so sorely needs in the administration of his pastoral duties.

It provides him with endless materials for purposes of public preaching and instruction. The pastor who uses the Bible as his guide can go on year after year throughout the long life of a constant and busy ministry and yet never want for new, fresh, helpful, and timely materials to present to his audiences. Here he has both Law and Gospel, that which is needed to work a conviction of sin

and that which enables him to lead the crushed and despairing soul to the brow of Calvary, there to find a friend and Savior, forgiveness and hope. Here are the moral ideals taught by God Himself and exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus, our Lord. No matter what the day and the place or who the audience may be, no matter what the questions of paramount current interest in a given society: divorce, child-training, industrial relationships, international peace, materialism, here is a Word which unfailingly provides guidance and direction. Everything needed for man's spiritual well-being and moral direction is presented in these sacred writings, so that the pastor, guided by his Bible, is never at a loss, 2 Tim. 3, 15—17. His position is most enviable as compared with the lot of the poor deluded preacher who turns from the Scriptures as something quite outmoded to book reviews, lectures on economics, government, and similar subjects.

The pastor who uses the Bible as his guide is not only provided with an inexhaustible storehouse of sermonic materials, but he is also, by the use of these materials, ever addressing himself to the very last and indispensable needs of men's immortal souls. Lectures on topics of current interest, learned discussions of new books, high-sounding addresses on topics of a philosophical character, may all fascinate and charm for the moment, but they must inevitably fail to satisfy the heart-hunger of sin-burdened man. Only he who brings the great glad tidings of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, only he who clearly and courageously presents the truths of God, can reach down to the inmost needs of human beings and fill their despairing souls with peace and happiness. Cf. Rom. 1, 16; 1 Thess. 2, 13; Ps. 19, 8; 2 Pet. 1, 19.

The pastor who employs the Bible as his guide is further able to speak with authority and finality. No one presents a more pitiful spectacle than the man who deals with spiritual things as though they lay in the realm of the physical sciences, as though God had said: "Find your own way of salvation. Discover for yourselves by the trial-and-error method what is right and what is wrong." That is the attitude of the so-called modern theologian. When he speaks, he can never express more than a human opinion, and that is forever subject to change and modification, so that what he represents as probable truth today may tomorrow be discredited and thrown overboard like an antiquated theory in physics or biology. Quite different is the position of the Christian pastor who is guided by the Scriptures. When he expresses himself on questions of moral or spiritual import, he gives utterance not just to an opinion which he momentarily holds and which tomorrow may be replaced by an altogether different view, but he proclaims the utterances of God which are eternally true and unchangeable.

He speaks with the finality and authority of divine revelation. "Thus saith the Lord," that is the secret of his power and of his ability to meet the needs of human souls, 1 Thess. 2, 13.

The pastor who employs the Bible as his guide is able also to give wise and successful direction to the management of congregational affairs. It happens occasionally that pastors find themselves in difficulty with the congregations which they serve. Many of these strained relations arise, it would seem, not because congregations object to hearing and heeding the truths of God, but rather because the pastor has allowed himself to become engaged in an altercation with his members or officers on questions which lie purely in the realm of human judgment. Perhaps nothing interferes more seriously with a pastor's influence in a congregation than his own insistence that his personal views on practical matters of church-life and activity, which must be decided on the basis of common sense, be given the same respect which he may well demand whenever he is proclaiming the counsel of God. We have known of an instance in which a pastor enraged quite a number of his people because he insisted upon having the picture of his confirmation class taken by a given photographer, while the members of the class and their parents wanted to go to another. We have known of an instance in which a pastor created a great stir in his congregation because he insisted upon having a casket lowered to the bottom of the grave before he would read the committal ceremony, whereas the undertaker and the family had agreed that it should be lowered only part-way. Visitors and District Presidents could no doubt relate many instances of a similar character. Congregational troubles and difficulties such as these can and by God's grace will be avoided by the wise pastor, who realizes that the Bible is his guide and that he can speak with finality and authoritatively only when the Bible itself has spoken. What is more, the pastor who scrupulously observes this distinction between his own opinions and the eternal truths of God will not only enjoy more peace and actually train a congregation to listen with due respect and obedience to whatever the Word of God teaches, but he will find himself more influential in those matters which God has left to man's common sense than he really cares to be.

It should here also be said that there are many occasions in the course of one's ministry when one is greatly tempted to deviate from the Word and in the pride of one's own wisdom and in the spirit of an opportunist to make compromises or pursue uncharted ways. Here is a poor woman whose life is most miserable with a husband hardly deserving of the name. She has no Scriptural grounds for a divorce, and yet, with sympathies and emotions

aroused, the temptation is great to make just this one exception. Again, the wives of two elders have a falling out. It is a scandalous situation, and the pastor wants it settled as quickly as possible. But neither of the two combatants is ready to go and speak to the other. What a temptation to ignore Matt. 18 and to try what momentarily seems like a wiser and better way to effect a reconciliation. Any one who has been in the ministry for some time knows how plentiful such temptations are; but he who has consistently used the Bible as his guide will also know from experience how blessed the results are when he adheres to the direction of the simple Word and refuses to let momentary emotions carry him away into all manner of disastrous experimentation.

When our Lutheran Church, then, says with the Scriptures, that the Bible should be the pastor's guide, it means just what it says. Our Church has no greater need today than this, that we again emphasize with all possible force the foundation principle of *sola Scriptura*. What the future of our Church will be depends entirely upon the blessings of God, which will rest upon the efforts made by our pastors in the application of this principle to the work which they are called to do in their respective fields. This will also determine the success or failure of the individual pastor in his ministry.

River Forest, Ill.

O. A. GEISEMAN

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## Luther, seine Rätke und seine Kinder

Ein Spiegel und Vorbild für christliche Pfarrfamilien

### Die Vorgeschichte

Wenn man Luthers theologischen Werdegang etwas genauer studiert, so wird man finden, daß er sich nicht nur in Fragen der Lehre, sondern auch in praktischen Fragen, in Problemen auf dem Gebiete der christlichen Ethik, erst nach und nach zur Klarheit hindurchgerungen hat. Dabei muß aber sofort auffallen, daß die Wechselbeziehung zwischen Lehre und Leben immer wieder zum Vorschein kommt und daß Fragen des Lebens ihre Beantwortung eben deswegen in der uns vorliegenden Form erhielten, weil Luther sich in allen Stücken nach der Norm der göttlichen Wahrheit richtete. Für ihn waren nicht nur die Teile der Schrift, die Christum treiben, von Gott inspiriert, sondern alle Bücher, die er als kanonisch anerkannte, und jedes Wort in diesen Schriften.

Dies gilt auch von allem, was Luther schon in den ersten Jahren seiner theologischen Wirksamkeit über den heiligen Ehestand geschrieben hat, wovon manches ihm erst später zum Bewußtsein gekommen ist, als die praktische Frage ihn direkt berührte. Wir denken hier besonders an die göttliche Ordnung der Ehe, an die Tatsache, daß die Ehe ein natür-