

Church Discipline: Recognition of Members

July 15, 2012

Who are recognized and Christians/ Members of the Christian Congregation?

“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Mt. 4. 17.

“Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Rom. 10

“My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me (a stranger they will not follow).” John 10

“Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.” Mt. 28

“If he will not listen to the church, then regard him as a heathen and a tax collector.” Mt. 18

Read Mt. 5.13-16: What does this mean? Is this salt and light the application of the Law or the Gospel? Both? When?

Who holds the power of the keys?

What is this? It is the peculiar power that Christ has given his church on earth to forgive the sins of the penitent, but to retain the sins of the impenitent, as long as they do not repent....

Where is this written? John 21.... “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained....

What do you believe according to these Words?

When the called minister of Christ deal with us according to God’s Word, especially when they exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from the Christian Congregation, and, again, when they absolve those who repent and are willing to amend, this is as valid and certain in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us himself.

Whose responsibility is Church Discipline? What is its purpose? What is its outcome?

When is a sin unforgivable/ a mortal sin? Why? Who is responsible for the sin not being forgiven?

What’s the role of the individual who sees or becomes aware of a brother’s sin?

What’s the role of others in the congregation?

What’s the role of the Pastor?

What’s the role of the congregation’s voter’s assembly relative to Matthew 18? What’s the order of authority between:

1. God’s Word.
2. Pastor.
3. Congregation.

tangle themselves in insoluble difficulties? So whom do they want to call “other sheep” who “are not from this fold”, as Christ says? – Lutherans? – or the Reformed? So which of the two, in their way of thinking, do not belong to the true church? Which one of them have not heard the voice of Christ? Which of them do not yet have Christ as their Shepherd? By this application Evangelicals make of this passage, they obviously either reject one party or the other. So don’t they contradict themselves, since they claim they don’t want to do this in what they wrote? – Oh, how necessary it is still to first rightly and carefully consider the Words of JESUS Christ in their context before using them to prove one’s own preconceived notions! It’s just as dangerous to explain it by what he only seems to be saying, merely by one’s first impression! It’s obviously true that if a friend of that union only lets his hearers hear the words: “There should be one flock and one Shepherd,” he can count on the fact that many people are unfamiliar with its context in Scripture, and most of their hearers will heedlessly accept that false interpretation of the words he presents them. But God will demand an accounting from those who so misuse God’s Word and thereby lead the naive into error.

We see the hope that others invent, that in the latter days the church would once more be set in a glorious, flowering condition, when the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, would be converted and the church would consist of only saints, as an enthusiastic (*schwaermerische*) hope without any Scriptural foundation at all. For the Bible much rather describes Christ’s kingdom on earth for us as a kingdom of the cross. It describes the last days as the most horrid of times. It teaches Christians to anticipate the dawning of the last day every moment and consistently promises them peace some day, in heaven and in eternal life. Therefore, far from our making ourselves safe and secure with sweet thoughts about some future day when the kingdom of God would bloom, we should, therefore, not allow ourselves to be deceived by the “great luminaries” of this last and fallen age, so we much rather rightly pray to the LORD, that he would also now preserve his pure truth to us at a time when, were it possible, even the elect would be misled into heresy. However, we constantly bear in mind that a time will come when the LORD’s actions will explain why we do not take part in the (chilastic) hopes of those who appear today in greater numbers, and yet confess they believe God’s Word.

(To be continued.)

“If your brother sins against you, go and reprove him between him and you alone. If he hears

you, you have won your brother. If he does not hear you, then take one or two with you, so that the whole matter can be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. If he does not listen to you, then tell it to the church. If he will not hear the church, then regard him as a heathen and a tax collector. Mt. 18.15-17.

“These days – writes Luther – many of you are blaming the servants of the church, the pastors and preachers, as if their negligence were to blame for the ban’s (the exclusion of manifest sinners from the fellowship of the church) having fallen into misuse. . . . But the saying and command of Christ (Mt. 18.) clearly shows that a sinner must be specifically and privately admonished and warned beforehand [by others], before those holding the public office of Pastor pronounce the sentence (verdict) and, even then, that sentence is not publicly declared before a public servant of the church has first applied a serious and Christian admonition. If the sinner ignores that and persists in his sin, if he will not stop or give up his sin, then the public ban must be published.

So, in our day, what now stands in the way of applying the ban? Nothing, except that no one is doing their duty that is required of a Christian in this matter. You have a neighbor whose life and walk is well known and recognized by you, but your pastor is either unaware of it or doesn’t know it so well, for how can he know the details about how everyone is living his life? Therefore whenever you see that your neighbor is getting rich through dishonest business or commerce, you see that he is practicing unchastity or adultery, or is being lax or negligent in raising and governing his family, you must seriously admonish him and give him a Christian warning, that he might see his salvation and put his offense away. And oh, what an utterly good, holy work you have done if you win him over that way! But, friend, who does that? For, in the first place, the truth hurts. Whoever tells the truth will make others unhappy. So you would rather stay friends and in your neighbor’s good graces than anger him and make him your enemy. This is also the case when the second, the third, the fourth neighbor also takes part in this, when the second and the third admonitions, by which a neighbor could have been restored again to the right path, fall on deaf ears along with the first one. So you will only admonish what you must by your duties of office, and nothing more [as a brother would].

Secondly, this also happens because, since we are all subject to the same blasphemies, our hands are dirty, we are afraid if we want to take the cinder out of our neighbor’s eye that he might well accuse us and tell us to remove the beam from our own eye. This is really the foremost reason that the

ban has practically disappeared, because there are altogether so few true Christians, such a small flock, very few in number. For if we were all at once as just and fair as we should be, having preference in our hearts for true piety and God’s Word, then we would regard the command of the LORD Christ as greater and more precious than anything we value in this temporal life. Then this command to admonish and warn a brother who is sinning would be just as necessary for us as these: Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal, etc. But since you always neglect this admonition, either out of fear or for some other reason, your neighbor isn’t in peril of losing property or life, but his soul’s salvation.” (Luther’s Works. Halle. IV, p. 2404-6.)

Augustine writes about this same situation: “Why do you rebuke your neighbor? Because you’re angry he’s sinned against you? May it never be! If you are doing it out of love for yourself, you’re wasting your time. Do it out of love for him. Then your actions will be perfectly right. You must do it for his sake, so that you win him. – If you don’t do it, you’re worse than him. Remember, he has committed a sin against you and has thereby wounded himself deeply, so how can you ignore your brother’s wounds? You see him perishing. Will you look the other way? You are worse for your silence than he is through the offense caused by his sinning against you. – Ignore your hurt feelings, but not your brother’s wounds. Therefore admonish him between you and him alone because you want to see his improvement, but spare him disgrace. For see, he might otherwise, out of shame, begin to defend his sins, and since you want his improvement, you would thus only make him worse. – So if you alone know he’s sinned against you and you want to broadcast his sin to everyone you’re not accusing, but betraying him.” (*Augustini Opp. Bas. T.S.*, fol. 69.)

If there’s ever been a time when these complaints and admonitions of Luther and Augustine were well founded and necessary, it must be now. For when has the prescribed rebuke of sinful brothers ordained by Christ been less practiced than right now? A brother or sister is seen sinning, so what happens? The person who sees it goes off and writes him off as an unbeliever or despises him in his heart as a poor Christian – and does not admonish him. Or his sin is trotted out, he is spoken of as evil behind his back, he is gossiped about and slandered but he himself is not confronted. Is that the love Christians should have for one another, so that everyone will know they, indeed, are disciples of Christ? Oh, no! For God says through his servant, Moses: “Thou shalt not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall rebuke your neighbor, so that you should not, for his sake, bear guilt.” Lev. 19.17. Thus, not admonishing your neighbor when you see him sin is, according to God’s Word, called hating him.