

Summer sermon series: Church, Mission and Ministry – The Enduring Value of Doctrine  
Based on John 8:31,32 - July 10, 2011 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
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### **Stay in the Word**

- I. You will know the truth**
- II. The truth will free you**

Do you like being lied to? Do feel appreciation when your teenager looks you in the eye and pops off a whopper? “Where were you last night?” “I was at Joey’s.” “All night?” “Yep, all night.” “I’ve come to find out you weren’t at Joey’s all night; in fact you weren’t at Joey’s at all. You were at Sarah’s, and I don’t know if I should be more angry that you stayed at your girlfriend’s all night or that you just told a boldface lie to my face.” Is it gratitude that overwhelms you when your son asks to go out and play and you say, “Did you take out the garbage?” “Yes, mom.” “OK, then you can go.” Two minutes later, you walk through the kitchen and find the garbage overflowing onto the floor. Do you like being played for a fool?

What about when your soul is on the line? Do you like being lied to then? Now we’re not talking about “Where were you last night,” we’re talking about “Where will you go when you die?” Would you be the first to volunteer to have a pastor lie to you and tell you things that may very well land you in hell? Nobody ever likes being lied to about anything. But isn’t it especially true that we are careful to feed our souls only the truth when eternity is hanging in the balance?

Let’s start with the principle that we will be working with today: false doctrine (spiritual lies) never builds faith. False doctrine always tears faith apart and leaves it in a heaping pile of rubble. False doctrine will never give peace; it will always enslave worse than before. God’s truth, on the other hand, always builds us up. It constructs the house of your faith piece by piece, brick by brick. God’s truth emancipates us from the slavery of sin, and establishes a real lasting peace in our hearts. As we continue our sermon series on the Church we ask ourselves the question, “How important is doctrine?” We have Jesus’ own words to guide us.

- I. Then you will know the truth

You can’t read anything today and assume that you’re getting the truth. If you read a newspaper, you’d like to assume that you’re getting the truth; but it has been proven over and over again in various articles that facts are made up, sources are misquoted, and political agendas slant the article. It’s hard to believe what you read from a source that is supposed to just report the details. That same principle holds true for just about every source of information, whether television news, internet articles, or magazines. The reason they will always be only marginally reliable is because they are written by sinful human beings.

Contrast that with the Bible, and carefully note the source: this is *God’s Word*. If the Bible is *God’s Word*, then it has to be the truth; there can be no lies in the Bible—there can’t even be anything false or misleading. If there are, then one of two things has to be true. Either it isn’t *God’s Word* anymore or God is now sinful for telling lies. We know that this is the only book in the world that we can read with the confidence that every

word is true because every word is God's word. Jesus himself said, **"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."** (John 17:17). We know that every word is God's Word because all Scripture is God-breathed. (1Timothy 3:16) In other words, God gave the writers of the Bible the exact words as they put ink to papyrus.

That's why, in our lesson this morning from John chapter 8, Jesus encourages us to stay in the Word, **"If you hold to my teaching... then you will know the truth."** When we stay in the Word, we will know the truth straight from God's own mouth. Think about the different truths that the Bible teaches us. We will know God's truth about angels and prayer. We will learn the truth about the proper role of government, about sex and marriage and the role of the husband and wife in marriage, about how to be a parent, an employee or a child; we will learn the truth about God, who he is, who Jesus is and who the Holy Spirit is. We will learn God's answer on moral issues like abortion and homosexuality, and on doctrinal issues like baptism and communion, conversion and creation, justification and sanctification.

Can you begin to appreciate the value in that? Here we have, straight from the mouth of God, his truthful answer on any conceivable life issue. We don't have to turn to psychologists, talk radio, or the media to help us weigh values or moral issues. We will stay in God's Word where he decides that for us. We don't have to consult an expert in constitutional law to figure out what the role of government is; God tells us the truth in the Bible. We don't have to turn to science or the Discovery Channel to figure out how the world got here; God settles the matter in the Bible (and by the way, if science happens to contradict what the Bible says, it isn't God who is wrong!). Every time God speaks, every answer that God gives we can be totally at ease because we know he's telling us the truth. God doesn't have a political agenda, isn't twisting facts or manipulating details. We will stay in the Word; then you will know the truth.

Two applications suggest themselves, one negative, one positive. It seems that every time a sermon is preached on the topic of the Word of God, there is a lot of guilt flying around. We feel badly because we don't hold the Word of God in the proper esteem it deserves; because Sunday is the only time during the week that God ever has a chance to talk to us; because our Bible study and personal Bible reading leaves something to be desired. We feel badly for making excuses why we don't share that Word of God with others. If we don't have a proper honor and respect of God's Word, then we should feel guilty.

We should also remember that the truth of God's Word, and his Word alone, is the truth that sets us free from our guilt. The Gospel tells us that Jesus died to forgive our sins of poor Bible study and poor church attendance just as much as he died to forgive our sins of immorality. Jesus died to forgive our sins of thinking we know better than God's Word. That's what God's Word tells us – that we have been set free from our sins and our guilt has been lifted by Christ's death on the cross. His Word tells us that through faith in Christ we have the sure certainty of eternal life in heaven after death.

So, what you are doing right now, gathering on Sunday morning around the Word of God and his Sacraments, is the single most important thing you can be doing with your life. That's why you will stay in the Word. If you haven't yet, you will develop a personal devotion routine. Stay in the Word. Make one of Bible Classes at church a part of your life, or Sunday School for the children. All of those applications certainly fall within what

Jesus says in John 8:31: Stay in the Word—then you will know the truth. Truth is the only thing that will build your faith, build God’s Church, give you hope for the future and guidance and comfort in this life.

There is another positive reason why God wants us to stay in the Word, and it is directly related to the first. There are two huge benefits to knowing your Bible. I’ve heard many people say, “Pastor, I try to stay away from religious discussions with other people because I don’t know enough about the Bible.” God wants us to get into religious discussions so we can share the good news of Christ! If he wants us to do that, then we want too as well! God wants us to stay in the Word so that we know it better, and when we know it better, then we can explain it better to those who do not. Secondly, God wants us to know the truth of this Word so that we become better at recognizing false doctrine and errors when they threaten us.

There’s a reason why God want us to be able to distinguish between truth and false doctrine. God knows that error is always bad for us. God knows that false doctrine hurts our souls by damaging our relationship with him. God doesn’t want you to buy into the pop culture lie (that unfortunately is spread by many Christian people) that only the really big false teachings will do any real damage to your soul. God knows that any amount of false doctrine will harm your soul. Let me explain it this way. You would feel comfortable if I gave your child a glass of filtered water? What if you saw me drop one pellet of rat poison into the cup? Would you give your child a cup of water and let him drink it? Would you say, “Oh, don’t worry about it. It’s just one little pellet of poison. It can’t do that much damage.” Pardon me for being blunt, but what parent would be so stupid to let their child drink a cup of water with any amount of poison in it? And what kind of a loving, heavenly Father would we have who lets us mess around with poisonous false doctrine when any amount of it will harm our soul?

The problem with all false doctrine is that it makes us slaves all over again. It points us away from Jesus and back to ourselves. It glorifies sin. It undermines faith. Here are a few examples of what I’m talking about. God tells us the truth about baptism in his Word. If you care to look at 1 Peter 3:21, God tells us that baptism saves us. In Acts 2:38ff, Peter explains that the promises of baptism belong to “you and your children.” Jesus tells us in Matthew 28:18-20 to baptize all nations. In spite of all that, many Christians today will not baptize children. That is a great example of a terrible false doctrine. Look how it enslaves people—they deny that God can work a miracle in baptism; they point people to the importance making a decision (themselves) rather than to God’s gracious washing in baptism; it elevates human reason over faith in the simple words of the Scriptures; and it denies saving faith to the children. The denial of infant baptism is a lie. It enslaves people.

Let me give you another example—an obvious one. There really are only two religions in the world. An individual is either saved by grace alone through faith alone, or he/she is saved by their own human effort and their own good works. There are a lot of variations of the second, but none so glaring and obvious as the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. We are not here to bash other denominations. Jesus has not called us to that. We doing what he commands us, to stay in the Word, and as he taught us in our Second Lesson this morning from 1John 4, “Test the spirits.” The Roman Catholic Church says, “If you believe that you are saved by grace alone, though faith alone, you will be condemned. You are saved by Jesus Christ and your own effort.” They say, “If you do not believe in the pope, you cannot be saved.” They even go so far as to say that if you are not Roman Catholic, you will go to hell. Do I need to go on about how that enslaves people?

Do I need to point out the obvious, how people are pointed to believe in a sinful man (the pope) for their salvation rather than in Jesus? Whoever really believes this stuff is still in bondage; they are slaves to their sin and guilt, and they are being pointed to themselves and the pope as the answer rather than to Jesus!

Let's apply what Jesus has taught us today: stay in the Word. Look for yourself in the Bible for the answers, for the truth, straight from God's mouth to your heart. **"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."** (Mark 16:16). Whoever is baptized... Baptism saves, no matter how old or young the child is. This is the truth that has set you free from your sins. As a baptized child of God you know that your sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ. What about salvation by works? **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast** (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is by God's grace, his love we don't deserve, that he saved us. Even faith is not something we earned or obtained for ourselves. God gave it to us as a gift! Faith simply receives all that Christ has done for you. These truths set you free from your sins, set free from your guilt, set free from hell and the grave.

This is *God's* Word. This is *God's* truth. This is *God's* doctrine. As God told us in the First Lesson from Deuteronomy 4, we will not mess with it. We will not add our own ideas, or take away from God's Word to suit our own reasoning, or twist Scripture to adapt to what is now acceptable to society. Who would want to? This is the truth; this is God's holy Word; it's perfect! How can you improve on perfection? And so we will stay in the Word. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Amen.

*God's Word is our great heritage and shall be ours forever;*

*To spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor.*

*Through life it guides our way; in death it is our stay.*

*Lord, grant while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure throughout all generations.*

Nikolai Grundtvig 1783-1872

*Christian Worship* hymn 293