**BIBLE QUESTIONS: SESSION 10**

**Questions: The church today, where is it theologically and where is it headed? What is universalism and relativism? What faiths are true to God’s word today? What is common and uncommon grace?**

*(For the “Lutheran” definition of the church consult especially the Articles VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession.)*

1. **The church today, *what is it*?**
   1. The church is defined in two aspects: visible and invisible. However these are not two churches but one holy Catholic Church.
      1. The Visible church is located wherever believers gather around the purely taught word and rightly administered sacraments. This is the true “catholic” church on earth.
      2. The Invisible church is the congregation of saints and true believers, either within the true visible church, or perhaps in other heterodox churches because of weakness and confusion. (e.g., Romans 10:9-10, Matt. 7:21-23)
      3. The visible/invisible distinction is only necessary because of hypocrisy. We must always recognize the possibility that there may be people who gather around the rightly taught word and sacraments, profess faith, do apparent good work and yet are deceivers in their heart. Only God knows the heart perfectly, and only God can judge outward works perfectly.
   2. **“The Church” as generic “Christianity”**
      1. Many Christians today lament the “decline in Christianity, church attendance, etc.” However this is a false perspective. Strictly speaking, *the church is not in decline*, for Christ always said and implied the church will be fewer in number compared to the world (Matt. 7:14; 22:14). What such Christians truly lament is the decline in the worldly approval, popularity and political influence of Christianity.
2. **Where is the church theologically and where is it headed?**
   1. The true church (visible and invisible) is theologically grounded in God’s Word and will remain forever (Matt. 16:18).
   2. “The Church”, in terms of legal popular Christianity will not. It will be supplanted by a fake Christianity/religion orchestrated by “the man of lawlessness/antichrist” (2 Thess. 2:3-4).
3. **What is universalism?**
   1. Universalism is the false doctrine that in the end, all people will be saved and there will be no human being in hell.
4. **What is relativism?**
   1. Relativism is the false doctrine that there is no absolute standard for judging anything (functional atheism), or if there is, we cannot know it (agnosticism). This implies either that God is not the source of all truth and goodness, or that he doesn’t exist.
5. **What faiths are true to God’s Word today?**
   1. We can identify four “categories” of “Christian Churches”: Orthodox, Heterodox, Heretical, and Cult (see chart). Only Orthodox Churches are entirely true to God’s Word.
      1. The only truly Orthodox Churches I am aware of are those who subscribe unconditionally to the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church, teach and practice according to them.
      2. Only those Churches who generally confess the primary fundamental doctrines of Christianity can be called Christian churches, even if they err in other areas if doctrine.
   2. Nearly all churches will *claim* they are true to God’s word “*as God intended it to be understood*”. Even those who deny parts of the bible usually *claim* to believe in the true “spirit” of God’s Word as He intended it.
6. **What is common and uncommon grace?**
   1. This is mainly reformed/Calvinistic distinction, though nothing wrong with it *per se*.
   2. Common Grace is God’s favorable attitude toward all his creatures in
      1. Providing for the necessities of life
      2. restraining outward sin and evil
      3. effecting the civil righteousness of the unregenerate
   3. Uncommon (Special) grace is the eternal life God bestows only upon his elect.
      1. Reformed teaching on grace suggests it is irresistible. Grace is never “offered” by God, it is either given or it isn’t. Therefore, according to Reformed theology, God does not desire anyone except the elect to have special grace.
      2. Lutheran teaching on this, though the Lutheran Confessions never use the term common or special grace, is that God offers and truly desires all to have his special grace; however, not all will receive it and those who don’t resist it.