

The Formula of Concord

Lesson Nine

On Ecclesiastical Practices

Introduction

Adiaphora is...

1. Is it okay for a Christian to wear green on Sundays? Why?
2. Is it okay for a Christian to go to Walmart and steal something? Why?
3. In both previous examples, it is clear what to do. However, there are times it is not clear what to do.

Is it okay for Christians to drink beer in church? Why or why not?

Historical Background

- During the Reformation period...
 - Lutherans gave up Catholic liturgical practices that were not true to the gospel
 - Retained some practices that expressed the gospel
 - After Luther's death things became complicated
- Confessional Lutherans knew there were several key issues that needed to be kept in mind
 - Some forms of worship were directly linked to Roman Catholic errors
 - To be forced to adopt forms of worship gave impression that the Catholic teaching associated with forms was right
 - Became a rule
- Philip Melancthon drew up a compromising set of rules for the Lutherans which agreed to the reinstatement of Catholic ceremonies – church rites were the first to surface

Search the Scriptures

1. Paul outlines several principles regarding adiaphora in this section (1 Corinthians 10:23-33). What are they?

³¹ *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

★ _____

²⁴ *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*

★ _____

²⁸ *But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake— 29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?*

★ _____

³² *Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—*

★ _____

²³ *"Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive.*

★ _____

Romans 14:1-8 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ² One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

2. What two groups of people does Paul address? (vs. 1-2)
3. What does he say to each? (v. 3)
4. What is to be the main goal in how we use or do not use adiaphora? (vs. 6-8)

5. What do the following passages add to the discussion?

- a. Galatians 2:3; Acts 16:1-3 - _____
- b. Colossians 2:16; Galatians 2:14 - _____
- c. 2 Corinthians 6:14,17 - _____

1. To settle this dispute, we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that ceremonies or ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but have been established only for good order and decorum, are in and of themselves neither worship ordained by God nor a part of such worship... 2. We believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the authority to alter such ceremonies according to its own situation, as may be most useful and edifying for the community of God" (Epitome X:3,4)

Are Church Rites Adiaphora?

1. Would you call rites and ceremonies adiaphora in the Old Testament? in the New Testament? (Colossians 2:16,17)

There is nothing pertaining to the church and its activity that has been prescribed as to outward form; no form for the worship service, the sermon, the prayers, the liturgy, the singing; also no time, frequency, no duration, no prescribed order of worship. Yes, not even for the worship gathering themselves, nor for gatherings of any kind, is there any explicit regulation. After the Lord gave the church the gospel and the sacraments and his Holy Spirit, he left all outward forms and arrangements, everything of a ceremonial nature, to the free determination of the church governed by the Spirit. (August Pieper – former professor at Seminary)

2. The Seventh Day Adventist church body teaches the following. In view of Scripture's teaching about adiaphora, why is each of these statements wrong?
 - We accept only those who have been baptized by immersion.
 - We demand members to tithe (give one-tenth of their income) in offerings.
 - We observe the true Sabbath (Saturday) as a test of obedience and faithfulness to God.

3. What would we be telling visitors if we adopted these positions? What would we be doing to their consciences?

Through it [forcing human commands upon the church as necessary] human commands will ultimately increase and will be regarded as service to God equal to that which God has commanded; even worse, they will even be given precedence over what he has commanded. (SD X:15)

When Adiaphora is not Adiaphora

4. We believe, teach and confess that in a time of persecution, when an unequivocal confession of the faith is demanded of us, we dare not yield to the opponents in such indifferent matters...For in such a situation it is no longer indifferent matters that are at stake. The truth of the gospel and Christian freedom are at stake. The confirmation of open idolatry, as well as the protection of the weak in faith from offense, is at stake. In such matters we can make no concessions but must offer an unequivocal confession and suffer whatever God sends and permits the enemies of his Word to inflict on us. (Epitome, X:6)

➤ Adiaphora ceases to be adiaphora when...

- ❖ They are _____ as necessary
- ❖ Their introduction involves a denial of _____, an admission of _____, or an infringement on Christian _____
- ❖ They _____ error and the enemies of the Church
- ❖ They are an _____ to Christians, especially the _____

Application

1. What should we do...

- if a Baptist friend argues that God's Word forbids drinking wine?
- A former Catholic who has recently joined your church and understands the biblical teaching of the Lord's Supper is still uneasy about your church's practice of placing the bread into the communicant's hand. She claims the Catholic Church teaches that it must be placed into the communicant's mouth.

2. Agree or Disagree. There is nothing Scripturally wrong with setting our liturgy to Metallica tunes. (*Metallica is a sometimes raucous hard rock band with undertones of Satanism*)

3. A fellow member complains to you that the new special services and contemporary worship forms that the pastor is using are wrong. How might you address this member's concerns?

4. List some adiaphora that we need to remember are adiaphora in our own congregational [worship] life.

Summary

Article X defends the teaching of Christian freedom. How does this article preserve and protect the gospel and the teaching of God's grace?

During the Week

Read Article XI of the Formula of Concord, Epitome.

XI. OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE [PREDESTINATION] AND ELECTION.

1] Concerning this article no public dissension has occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. But since it is a consolatory article, if treated properly, and lest offensive disputations concerning the same be instituted in the future, it is also explained in this writing.

AFFIRMATIVA.

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning This Article.

2] 1. To begin with [First of all], the distinction between *praescientia et praedestinatio*, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.

3] 2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written Dan. 2, 28: *There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.*

4] 3. This foreknowledge extends alike over the godly and the wicked, but it is not the cause of evil, neither of sin, namely, of doing what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man), nor of their ruin [that men perish], for which they themselves are responsible [which they must ascribe to themselves]; but it only regulates it, and fixes a limit to it [how far it should progress and] how long it should last, and all this to the end that it should serve His elect for their salvation, notwithstanding that it is evil in itself.

5] 4. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, extends only over the godly, beloved children of God, being a cause of their salvation, which He also provides, as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it. John 10, 28; Matt. 16, 18.

6] 5. This [predestination of God] is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed.

7] 6. But the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected that are to be saved in eternity, as it is written Eph. 1, 4: *He hath chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world.*

8] 7. This Christ calls to Himself all sinners and promises them rest, and He is in earnest [seriously wills] that all men should come to Him and suffer themselves to be helped, to whom He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it and not to stop their ears or [neglect and] despise the Word. Moreover, He promises the power and working of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation [that we may remain steadfast in the faith and attain eternal salvation].

9] 8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither from reason nor from the Law of God, which lead us either into a reckless, dissolute, Epicurean life or into despair, and excite pernicious thoughts in the hearts of men, for they cannot, as long as they follow their reason, successfully refrain from thinking: If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, no matter what I do; and again: If I am not elected to eternal life, it is of no avail what good I do; it is all [all my efforts are] in vain anyway.

10] 9. But it [the true judgment concerning predestination] must be learned alone from the holy Gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that *God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all, and that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and believe in the Lord Christ.* Rom. 11, 32; Ezek. 18, 23; 33, 11; 2 Pet. 3, 9; 1 John 2, 2.

11] 10. Whoever, now, is thus concerned about the revealed will of God, and proceeds according to the order which St. Paul has observed in the Epistle to the Romans, who first directs men to repentance, to knowledge of sins, to faith in Christ, to divine obedience, before he speaks of the mystery of the eternal election of God, to him this doctrine [concerning God's predestination] is useful and consolatory.

12] 11. However, that *many are called and few chosen*, Matt. 22, 14, does not mean that God is not willing to save everybody; but the reason is that they either do not at all hear God's Word, but willfully despise it, stop their ears and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that He cannot perform His work in them, or, when they have heard it, make light of it again and do not heed it, for which [that they perish] not God or His election, but their wickedness, is responsible. [2 Pet. 2, 1ff; Luke 11, 49. 52; Heb. 12, 25f.]

13] 12. Thus far a Christian should occupy himself [in meditation] with the article concerning the eternal election of God, as it has been revealed in God's Word, which presents to us Christ as the Book of Life, which He opens and reveals to us by the preaching of the holy Gospel, as it is written Rom. 8, 30: *Whom He did predestinate, them He also called*. In Him we are to seek the eternal election of the Father, who has determined in His eternal divine counsel that He would save no one except those who know His Son Christ and truly believe on Him. Other thoughts are to be [entirely] banished [from the minds of the godly], as they proceed not from God, but from the suggestion of the Evil Foe, whereby he attempts to weaken or entirely to remove from us the glorious consolation which we have in this salutary doctrine, namely, that we know [assuredly] that out of pure grace, without any merit of our own, we have been elected in Christ to eternal life, and that no one can pluck us out of His hand; as He has not only promised this gracious election with mere words, but has also certified it with an oath and sealed it with the holy Sacraments, which we can [ought to] call to mind in our most severe temptations, and take comfort in them, and therewith quench the fiery darts of the devil.

14] 13. Besides, we should use the greatest diligence to live according to the will of God, and, as St. Peter admonishes, 2 Pet. 1, 10, *make our calling sure*, and especially adhere to [not recede a finger's breadth from] the revealed Word: that can and will not fail us.

15] 14. By this brief explanation of the eternal election of God His glory is entirely and fully given to God, that out of pure mercy alone, without all merit of ours, He saves us according to the purpose of His will; besides, also, no cause is given any one for despondency or a vulgar, wild life [no opportunity is afforded either for those more severe agitations of mind and faintheartedness or for Epicureanism].

ANTITHESIS or NEGATIVA.

False Doctrine concerning This Article.

16] Accordingly, we believe and hold: When any teach the doctrine concerning the gracious election of God to eternal life in such a manner that troubled Christians cannot comfort themselves therewith, but are thereby led to despondency or despair, or the impenitent are strengthened in their wantonness, that such doctrine is treated [wickedly and erroneously] not according to the Word and will of God, but according to reason and the instigation of the cursed Satan. For, as the apostle testifies, Rom. 15, 4, *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.* Therefore we reject the following errors:

17] 1. As when it is taught that God is unwilling that all men repent and believe the Gospel.

18] 2. Also, that when God calls us to Himself, He is not in earnest that all men should come to Him.

19] 3. Also, that God is unwilling that every one should be saved, but that some, without regard to their sins, from the mere counsel, purpose, and will of God, are ordained to condemnation so that they cannot be saved.

20] 4. Also, that not only the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, but also in us there is a cause of God's election, on account of which God has elected us to everlasting life.

21] All these are blasphemous and dreadful erroneous doctrines, whereby all the comfort which they have in the holy Gospel and the use of the holy Sacraments is taken from Christians, and therefore should not be tolerated in the Church of God.

22] This is the brief and simple explanation of the controverted articles, which for a time have been debated and taught controversially among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. Hence every simple Christian, according to the guidance of God's Word and his simple Catechism, can perceive what is right or wrong, since not only the pure doctrine has been stated, but also the erroneous contrary doctrine has been repudiated and rejected, and thus the offensive divisions that have occurred are thoroughly settled [and decided].

23] May Almighty God and the Father of our Lord Jesus grant the grace of His Holy Ghost that we all may be one in Him, and constantly abide in this Christian unity, which is well pleasing to Him! Amen.