

Article: Are we Narrow-Minded and Cold?

Are we narrow-minded and cold? Can we be described this way because we do not join non-Lutherans (including liberal, falsely so-called Lutherans) in worship and prayer, do not sit at the feet of their teachers for religious instruction, do not share Holy Communion with them?

Some people may say so, but that is a misunderstanding. Because their preachers encourage carelessness, members of other denominations find it very hard to understand why we are cautious in these areas.

We are not narrow-minded or cold. We do not have a closed-door policy. We welcome anyone to attend our worship services and our Bible studies, to hear and learn the Word of God with us. But out of obedience to God and love for people, we do insist on a confession of faith in clear Biblical truth before receiving someone into communicant membership or welcoming him as a guest at Communion. That is not at all unfriendly. It is genuine, Christian love and concern for the other's spiritual well-being. Is a doctor unfriendly because he asks about a person's physical health before he prescribes treatment? Is a teacher unfriendly because he asks about a person's previous education before he tries to teach him? Is a lawyer unfriendly because he asks about a person's legal status before he gives advice? Neither is a pastor or any Christian unfriendly when he asks about a person's spiritual condition. That is care, concern, and love. A willingness to help does no good if we cannot know when and where what help is needed.

We should be as friendly, warm, and sociable as possible in dealing with everyone, including Christians who deny some Biblical teachings. We may have very fine personal relationships with them.

But we do not join in worship with those who depart from Scripture. We do not put ourselves into the position of being taught by anyone who denies any part of what the Bible teaches. We do not commune with those who do not believe what Jesus says about the Sacrament.

That is not hatred but love - being concerned about the spiritual well-being of others. For truth matters. The Word of God matters. We cannot treat departures from it lightly - because of the danger to souls for whom Christ died.

It is also a matter of obeying our Lord. He tells all Christians: "*Beware of false prophets!*" (Matthew 7:15). The Bible teaches that Christians are to be in agreement with one another - on the basis of what the Bible teaches, because the Bible is God's Word (see Romans 16:17 and 1 Corinthians 1:10).

So we are always willing to talk about spiritual matters with others - with the Bible open! But we cannot join with them unless any disagreements are settled first. No two groups of any kind can unite and work together unless they are doing the same work in the same way.

A Christian congregation exists for the purpose of glorifying God and proclaiming His Word for the salvation of people. Obviously we cannot achieve that purpose by working together with those who do not proclaim His Word purely but mix in human thoughts and teachings. We cannot do that any more than we could work together with those who deny the Word of God entirely.

More important than God's commands in this matter are God's promises. Our Lord says: "Therefore, Jesus said to those Jews who had become believers in Him, *"If you remain in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (John 8:31-32). We want to remain steadfastly with the pure Word of God because of the blessings and benefits God gives us through it: comfort, strength, motivation, the assurance of eternal life for Jesus' sake.

Others may accuse us of pride, saying that we think we are right and have a monopoly on truth. That is not the point at all. It is not in pride but in humility that we bow before the Word of God, accepting all that it teaches, even if it goes against our human reason. The Lord says: "*on him who is humble and broken in spirit and who trembles at My Word*" (Isaiah 66:2). It is God's Word, God's truth. We take no credit for it but give Him all the glory.

The reason some people mistakenly consider us proud is that they think Christian doctrine is simply a matter of human opinion, as if theology were mere human philosophy. If we did insist that we were always right about everything, that would be tremendous arrogance. We have trouble convincing others that we are not standing up for the correction of our conclusions and opinions. We are standing up for the clear truth of God's Word.

Any departure from the Word of God does lead to human thinking - to philosophy - in religion. And human thinking always leads away from the teaching and truth that we are saved only by and because of Jesus. Human teaching will always in some way tell us that we must save ourselves. The Bible always tells us in every way that we cannot save ourselves but that Christ has already paid the debt for our sin and earned forgiveness, life, and salvation for us by His life and death in our place.

As important as it is for our hearts to be focused on Jesus as our only Saviour, that is how important it is to remain only with His Word in all spiritual matters. And that is also how important it is for us - out of love and concern for others - to want to direct their thoughts about religion only to Jesus and to His Word.

What seems to worldly - minded people to be pride, hatred, and insistence on human opinion is really humility, love, and loyalty to the divine Word. Only in this way is the sweet, clear Gospel sweetly and clearly proclaimed. We must not take credit for the humility, love, and loyalty any more than we take credit for the Word. It is all God's doing, and He deserves all the glory. The only pride here is on the part of those who do not accept God's Word.