

St. Paul Lutheran Church

Sunday Morning Bible Class

Formula of Concord Series

Articles 9 & 10 – The Descent into Hell and Adiaphora

The Questions at Issue:

- 1) When and how did Christ descend into hell? (Body, soul, or both? Part of humiliation or part of exaltation? Before or after death? Before or after resurrection?)
- 2) a) If something is neither commanded nor forbidden by God (Adiaphoron) Christians may, in times of persecution, reintroduce ceremonies that have been abolished to appease their persecutors.
b) During times of persecution, Christians dare not compromise, even in matters of adiaphora, since a clear-cut testimony is called for and such compromise can cloud our witness.

Why It Matters

- 1) The point at which Christ descended into hell is not as important as understanding the purpose and goal of that descent. To misunderstand the purpose is to call into question Jesus' proclamation from the cross: "It is finished!"
- 2) Adiaphora (of the sort here questioned) were introduced for the good order of the Church and to enhance true worship and clarity of confession. If they fail to do so, they can, in themselves, become something other than adiaphora.
- 3) To command as necessary, or in some other way require something that is not commanded by Scripture, is dangerous at best, and in most cases sinful.

What the Bible Teaches Concerning Christ's Descent Into Hell

- 1) The Biblical teaching concerning Christ's descent into hell must be grasped by faith and not by reason alone. We must also freely admit that there is much about this event that are not told and/or do not understand.
- 2) We do know that Christ went to hell, destroyed hell for all believers by redeeming us, and that hell need no longer fear or intimidate us.

1 Peter 3:18-19 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison. NKJ

1 Peter 3:18-19 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison. ESV

Colossians 2:13-15 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of

requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

What the Bible Rejects Concerning Christ's Descent Into Hell

1) Any notion that hell is not a real place of punishment and untold misery for those who rebelled against God (as with the unholy angels) and those who die in unbelief.

Jude 1:5-7 But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; ⁷ as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

2) That Christ did not really descend into hell, but only figuratively.

3) Any teaching concerning Christ descent into hell that seeks to separate his two natures – as though he only descended according to the human nature or according to the divine nature, but not both, since the two natures of Christ cannot be separated.

4) The idea that Christ descended into hell to give those imprisoned there another chance to be saved.

Hebrews 9:27-28 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Romans 2:21 You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? (Cf. "preached" in 1 Peter 3:19 above.)

What the Bible Teaches Concerning Adiaphora in Times of Persecution

1) Man-made ceremonies which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God are in themselves no divine worship or even a part of it.

Matthew 15:7-9 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

2) Christians in every community and every age have the right and freedom to use or not use ceremonies and customs as they determine would be most edifying.

3) Worship services are to be conducted in good order.

1 Corinthians 14:40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

4) Christians should never yield or compromise in indifferent things if such compromise would cloud their doctrine or the differences that exist between them and false teachers.

Galatians 5:1-3 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. ² ¶ Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³ I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

Galatians 2:3-5 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in--who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery-- ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

5) No Christian congregation ought to condemn another Christian congregation solely for their inclusion or rejection of certain man-made ceremonies as long as there is full agreement in matters of doctrine, order in the church, and right use of the sacraments.

Colossians 2:16-23 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. ²⁰ ¶ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-- ²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

What the Bible Rejects Concerning Adiaphora in Times of Persecution

- 1) That human precepts and institutions in the church are to be regarded as in themselves divine worship or a part of it.
- 2) Whenever a human precept, institution, or ceremony is imposed on Christians as necessary, which is a violation of Christian liberty in external matters.

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

- 3) That in times of persecution or public confession or controversy, one may in good conscience make concessions or come to an understanding with the enemies of the gospel in connection with indifferent things or ceremonies.

Galatians 2:3-5 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in--who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery-- ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

- 4) The abolition or forbidding of such indifferent things in such a way as to suggest that the community of God does not have the liberty to employ such ceremonies when and where their witness is not compromised and good order is enhanced.