

Pentecost 13

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What has Straw to Do with Grain?

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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Straw will fill your belly when you eat it. Straw, however, has no nutritional value. Grain is both filling and nourishing. It makes no sense to eat just straw, or in combination with grain. False doctrine is like straw. True teaching is like grain.

The prophet Jeremiah preached in Israel. He fed the people the grain of God's true Word. Working against Jeremiah were the lying prophets. They were feeding people the straw of their own imaginations. The LORD decried these lying prophets and the harm they did. The LORD compared their empty words to straw, and his powerful Word to grain.

Then, the LORD asked the question of our theme: **What has Straw to Do with Grain?** Lying prophets speak their own delusions. The one who has God's Word is to speak it truthfully.

The southern kingdom, Judah, six centuries before Jesus' birth was filled with lying preachers. Many in Israel accepted those lies that broke the Second Commandment, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." They forsook the LORD to follow the idol, Baal, one of the false deities in the land.

This does not sound all that different from today. The Second and First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods," remain true. Lying prophets urge Christians and others to follow false gods; not Baal but the idols of church councils, human ordinances, Unitarian deities, and popular opinion. The LORD warned Judah. His warning applies today. Turn from these false gods in repentance.

Judah did not repent. Like Israel it fell under God's judgment at the hands of a foreign nation. This was God's just verdict for their apostasy, their falling away by listening to the lying prophets. God's just verdict stands against those today who bend the knee to false gods so long as they do not repent.

False doctrine in any form or degree is like straw. It may be filling but it is not nourishing. Nothing may diminish God, of course. But a lying preacher saying his dreams, or his ideas, or his opinions are the Word of God, diminishes the ministry of the Word. The one believing those lies is like the person eating straw. Even as they take it in and take it in, they will slowly starve to death for lack of life giving nourishment.

The LORD God indicates clearly that he is not just a God nearby as a statue or some other local presentation of an idol. A Baal worshiper could hide from Baal's presence physically but you can't hide from God's presence because he fills all things. Think of the other idle, to do nothing. An idol is idle. It can do nothing because it does not exist. The LORD God acts because he is. That is why the lies and promises false teachers claim come from their gods are meaningless, not to mention harmful even damning.

Today's lying prophets are those who claim to speak in God's name, and to speak for God while denying God's very essence. They deny his way of salvation through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice alone. Many of the cults vaguely resemble the orthodox, historical

Christian faith, many do not. Many alter God's Word like you would alter a pair of pants, or a suit. They exchange revealed truth with their dreams, ideas, interpretations, and bend to popular opinion like a reed in the wind.

All false doctrine is like straw. True teaching does not have a grain of truth. It is truth that is like grain that satisfies and nourishes the mind, heart and soul. The one who has God's Word is to speak it faithfully.

Jeremiah had a secretary named Baruch. Along with Jeremiah he suffered greatly because they stayed faithful to the Bible's message of sin and grace, law and gospel, repentance and faith. Jesus too made it clear that following him brings crosses. His Word divides people as there are those who believe it as spoken and those who reject it and try to reformulate it.

Make no mistake, the Word of God is not unclear and weak. It is clear and powerful. It is like grain over straw. The LORD speaks about his Word's refining power like fire as it purifies our thoughts and ideas from error. The law hammers and crushes hearts encrusted in sin and pride.

The message of God's forgiveness in Christ is the means of grace that creates in us a new heart and creates a right spirit within us. Jeremiah spoke the truth. The predicted judgment came to pass. The LORD God did preserve a remnant for himself. From that remnant came Abraham's descendant in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Enemies attack the clear and powerful true Word of God as being loveless and judgmental. They misunderstand that attacking false doctrine is not attacking the person whom that doctrine is leading astray away from God's Word. There is confusion between being a member of the invisible church through faith in Christ, and being a member of the visible church where confessions of faith must be weighed against the Scripture.

Faithfully handling the Word of God, the Word of truth is the responsibility of everyone who has it. This is true not only of public ministers but all of God's people. Faithfulness with the Word is not only preaching it no matter what. It is believing it no matter what. It is doing it no matter what.

God intends the one who has the Word of God to speak it faithfully. This will make us aware of our sins and condemnation. This will make us aware of God's counting us not guilty of sins because Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree, and rose again for our justification. This will empower us to believe in Jesus Christ and live a godly life according to his Word in grateful expression of our faith in love.

You have heard of the straw man argument; the thing that someone argues but is not really true. So it is with the straw man doctrine. People preach it and believe it but it is not really true. No straw man doctrine ever nourished a Christian's faith or brought an unbeliever to faith in Christ.

Finally, all the lies, all the false teachings and revelations, and men's dreams are burned up and disappear. But, Verbum Dei manet aeternum, the Word of the Lord stands forever. Because what does straw have to do with grain? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Amen.

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