

Why Dare and Can We Never Give Up the Church's Struggle for the Pure Doctrine?

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Lord Jesus, hot was the conflict which once our fathers had to fight; but glorious was the victory which you granted them. Therefore, we today joyfully extol and praise you. For what our fathers once had to gain by fighting, your precious pure saving Word, that today is still their children's, our precious inheritance.

However, this holy war has not yet ended. The foe is continually trying to tear from us what we have. Therefore, you also constantly cry to us: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Rev 3:11). "Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3). Therefore, grant that the remembrance of our fathers who fought faithfully until death will today enkindle us to fight in our days as they did, so that we may be as victorious as they, some day be crowned by you, and also rejoice with them forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture text: Jude 3. *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*

The history of the Reformation, whose remembrance we today celebrate, is the story of a continuous war of almost 30 years, from the year 1517 when Luther publicly posted his 95 Theses against the papal abomination of the indulgence until the year 1546 when Luther died. This war was not so much a physical as a spiritual one. On the one side stood Luther, a defenseless monk, no weapons in his hand but the Bible, and supported alone by a few generally fainthearted friends. On the other side stood the well-reinforced pope with the temporal and spiritual sword, as he called it, that is, the power of church and state, in his hand, supported by a countless host of prelates, of cardinals, bishops and archbishops, of priests, monks, and nuns, as well as by the greatest world monarchy of that time in Christendom, the Emperor. On the one side, however, stood error, on the other, the truth; on the one side, the word of men, on the other, God's Word; and this is the main thing: on the one side stood the invisible Jesus Christ, the King of truth and the Lord of salvation with all his holy angels, on the other, Satan, the prince of darkness and ruin with his entire hellish army.

Today 359 years ago, on October 31, 1517 it was as Luther with those 95 Theses first declared war on the pope and all his followers, girded himself with the sword of the Spirit, as David once did with his sling against Goliath, left his dark monk's cell in the name of the Lord the living God, made his appearance, and to all who wanted to stand on the side of the Lord and his true Church gave the signal for the attack and the holiest war which was ever waged on earth. Then followed one engagement upon another, orally and in writing. In the year 1518 Luther was victorious in a secret duel in Augsburg with the Cardinal Cajetan on the subject of the one little word: "Revoco," that is, "I recant;" but all the rhetoric of the wily Italian was in vain: Luther did not recant and thus left the arena as victor. In the year 1519 followed a public debate between Luther and the papal sophist Dr. Eck in the Leipzig Disputation in which the matter dealt chiefly with the standing of the papacy and the councils; but at the close all who were of the truth, even

papists, granted Luther the prize of victory. Two years later in the year 1521 Luther was finally cited to appear in Worms, in order to appear personally before emperor and empire to defend himself and hear his sentence. All the friends of Luther trembled but not he. He stated: "And if there were as many devils in Worms as tiles on the roof tops, I would go; and if my friends would make a fire from Wittenberg to Worms which would reach up into heaven, I would still enter the mouth between his large teeth, confess Christ, and let him rule." Thus a hot battle began. but see! as Daniel came unhurt from the lions' den and as the three men came unscathed from the fiery furnace, so Luther again left Worms unconquered; for his closing declaration is and remains: "I do not recant! Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen!"

A second hot Reformation battle was fought during the presentation of our Confession to the Diet at Augsburg in the year 1530. Because he was excommunicated by the pope and outlawed by the emperor, Luther could not stand in this great, decisive conflict at Augsburg with the rank and file of the confessors of the Gospel, but as the real God-chosen general in this war he was not only the one who by the writing of the Torgau Articles, so to say, had sketched the battle plan and dictated the articles of peace, but he was also the one who during the diet led and encouraged from Coburg the little group in Augsburg who stood before the foe by his daily letters. And what happened? What Luther even during the raging conflict had composed and sung:

*A mighty Fortress is our God,
A trusty Shield and Weapon;
He helps us free from every need
That hath us now o'ertaken.*

That was gloriously fulfilled. Also this decisive battle was won. In spite of the threatening bloody imperial recess, the huts of the righteous of all Christendom again sang of victory. However, the story of the Reformation is not only the story of a war from without, but also a spiritual civil war. After Zwingli, the Swiss preacher, had at first agreed with Luther and had bravely battled with him for God's Word against the papal doctrines of men, Zwingli soon fell away and declared: It is against reason to believe that Christ's body and blood is in the Lord's Supper. With dismay Luther saw that Zwingli intended to replace the pope with human reason. So after the futile exchange of several polemical writings between Luther and Zwingli in the year 1529 after the Colloquy at Marburg there finally came a decisive battle. Whether the words of the truthful and almighty Son of God: "This is my body, this is my blood," still stand firmly, hence whether God's Word must give way to reason or whether reason must give way to God's Word, that was the second *causus belli*, the second great cause of war which was to be decided in Marburg. And praise God! Luther did not give ground even here; as he in Worms had preserved God's Word against the pope's authority of the church, so in Marburg he preserved the same Word of God against the authority of human reason.

And thus Luther continued the fight until he was finally called into the land of eternal peace, in order to be crowned there and to celebrate with all faithful soldiers the feast of triumph of eternal life.

Now my dear brethren, has the victory of the Reformation of the Church finally brought peace? Alas no! The Church is to triumph above; here it must fight until the peal of the last trumpet. That God's Word testifies to us on all pages, and so also the apostle Jude, who has the surname Thaddeus, writes in our text: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the

common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you *that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*"

On the basis of these words permit me today to answer the question:

WHY DARE AND CAN WE NEVER GIVE UP THE CHURCH'S STRUGGLE FOR THE PURE DOCTRINE?

I answer:

1. Because the Pure Doctrine of our Church is Not Our Possession, but a Treasure Only Entrusted to us for Our Faithful Administration;
2. Because the Loss of This Treasure Would be Something Much More Terrible than All the Strife and Discord Among Men; and finally,
3. Because this Conflict is One *Commanded* by God, and Therefore is Certainly *Blessed* by God in Time and in Eternity.

[1. Because the Pure Doctrine of our Church is Not Our Possession, but a Treasure Only Entrusted to us for Our Faithful Administration]

The first reason why it is supposed that the time has finally come to stop the strife for the pure doctrine in our Church is because this everlasting quarreling and fighting, as it is called, is against love. Christ, they say, says in clear words: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:35. Therefore, John also writes: "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." (I John 3:14). Yes, Paul says expressly: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." (I Cor 13: 1,13). When the Galatians quarreled and fought with one another, the same apostle severely reprimanded them and wrote: "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." (Gal 5:15).

It is true, my friends, that brotherly love is the indispensable sign of true Christians; without love all other virtues are only an empty pretense and all gifts, no matter how great, are unprofitable; it is true that loveless quarreling and fighting can bring only ruin; yet it does not in the least follow that for us the time has finally come to give up all the struggle for the pure doctrine in our Church; for as we have already heard the Apostle Jude writes thus in our text: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you *that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" Concerning the true faith the apostle, therefore, says that it was "once delivered unto the saints." True faith, or what is the same, the pure doctrine, is, therefore, not given but only "delivered" to the saints, that is, not granted to them but only given into their charge, not made their possession over which they are free lords and with which they can do as they please but only something entrusted to them as belonging to another, that is, God's possession, which they merely as servants and stewards must faithfully preserve and administer.

Now tell me yourself: Does love demand that a steward give away some of the property entrusted to him, or that he make a reduction of the debt to the debtors of his lord? or that he can calmly take for himself the treasures of his lord which are given to him to guard and keep? Was it, for example, love when that steward, in order to make him his friend, said to a debtor who

owed his lord 100 measures of oil: "Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty?" (Luke 16:6). Was that not rather unfaithfulness, yes, open deceit and theft? Does not Christ for that reason also call him the "unjust steward?" Would it be love if in order to avoid a battle a general would allow merely a small opening to be made for the enemy in the wall of a fortress given to him to defend? Would not such a general rather be called to account and punished as a traitor? Or is it love to steal their possessions from others in order to do good to the poor? and finally, would it be love if Luther would have immediately become silent about the discovered and known truth?

So judge for yourself: Would it be love if in the conflict for the pure doctrine "*delivered*" to us, that is, entrusted to us only for faithful administration, we Lutherans would finally give up? If in order to make friends among men and in order to pass for loving and peaceable people, we would let it go? No, that would not be brotherly love, or love of our neighbor, to say nothing of love toward God, but self-love, not faithful stewardship of the great possession entrusted to us by God only to be administered but shameful embezzlement of another's possession, yes, nothing else before God but robbery and theft. And thieves shall not inherit eternal life. Of course, our love should be ready for the sake of peace to yield in such things over which we have the say, but not in things over which not we but others are in control; true, our love should be ready to sacrifice everything which we have, even our life if necessary, however, not the possessions of others but only our own. That is why in the year 1522 Luther said to his opponents: "*My love* is ready to die for you ...; but *faith* or the Word you should adore. You can expect anything you want of our *love*; but fear our *faith* in all things."

Oh my dear friends of the Lutheran faith, confession, and conflict, do not be misled when today those are everywhere accused of lovelessness who still do not give up the battle for pure doctrine in our Church. Bear in mind: This doctrine, as our text says, is the faith which "*was once delivered unto the saints*." It, therefore, is not our property which we would have the power and freedom to give away. It is rather God's property which we can but administer and not only we ourselves but all Christendom, yes, which the entire world should preserve and leave behind and give to the coming generation. On that day God will, therefore, say to us also in regard to the pure doctrine of his Word which he has entrusted to us Lutherans: "Give account of thy stewardship!"

True, it is a bitter disgrace to have to let oneself be regarded as heartless and loveless people; yes, believe it, my friends, this disgrace will often completely break the hearts of those fighting for God's pure Word. This disgrace, however, all true soldiers have always had to endure. Therefore, our pious fathers also say in the confessional writings of our Church: "To dissent from the agreement of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grave matter. But divine authority commands all not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty." Therefore, that the world might see that love is still in us Lutherans, let us in all earthly things show our love so much the more richly; however, in matters pertaining to God, to the pure doctrine of his Word which "*was once delivered unto the saints*" let Christ's utterance be our motto and guiding star: "He that loveth father, or mother, and he that loveth son, or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."

[2. Because the Loss of This Treasure Would be Something Much More Terrible than All the Strife and Discord Among Men]

However, my dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, we still cannot give up the struggle for the pure doctrine in our Church because secondly, the loss of this treasure would be something much more frightful than all the strife and discord among men.

It is true, my friends: The conflict and strife being continually carried on in all Christendom, not only between the different church denominations but often between the members of one and the same church, is such a great calamity, that it simply cannot be expressed in words nor deplored sufficiently, yes, neither wept over enough with bloody tears. Is it not a calamity that all who want to be the children of one and the same heavenly Father, the servants of one and same Savior, the temples of one and the same Holy Spirit, fight with one another? Is it not a calamity that those who are to fight against the countless and mighty foes of Christendom as one man, draw their sword against each other? How Satan must rejoice when he sees this disunity among Christians. How many unbelievers are offended and, therefore, do not want to become Christians because they think: How can that be the only saving religion whose confessors, so to say, lacerate one another? And also how many weak Christians go astray in their Christianity and fall again to the world!

What? many, therefore, say, is it not high time that we Lutherans finally give up our struggle for the pure doctrine in our Church? that we, as Isaiah has prophesied, beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks? that we at last make peace with all Christians, extend them the hand of reconciliation, and we unite with them in one great congregation of peace? Certainly, my dear hearers, if we Lutherans could purchase a salutary, universal treaty of peace with our blood, no Lutheran, to say nothing of a Lutheran minister, would consider his blood so precious but would rather with a thousand joys shed it in this behalf.

And yet, my dear brethren, we cannot give up our struggle for the pure doctrine in our Church. This the Word of God teaches on all its pages, this also our text teaches us when we read: "*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of THE COMMON SALVATION, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" Because the apostle wanted to write to the Christians "*of the common salvation*" he deemed it necessary, first of all, to admonish them to "*contend for the faith.*" So according to this apostolic explanation the question concerns nothing less than "*the common salvation.*" (German: the salvation of us all.)

Dare we, can we, therefore, now give up the conflict for the pure doctrine in our Church? Never! Yes, if we were fighting over money and goods, over honor before men, over good days, in brief, over earthly things, woe would be us if we would never ask whether peace in the world and Church is thus being destroyed, whether unbelievers and weak Christians were being offended, whether God's work was being hindered or not. But it is a different matter when we "*contend for the faith which once was delivered unto the saints.*" Then we are not fighting over temporal but eternal treasures, then we are fighting not over man's but God's honor, then we are fighting not for this but for eternal life, then according to our text we are fighting in one word, "*for the common salvation.*"

That is why even all the prophets and apostles and Christ himself constantly fought for the pure faith; and indeed Christ expressly says in Matthew 10: "Think not that I am come to send peace

on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." (Matthew 10:34-36).

The strife which arises because one fights for the pure doctrine is, therefore, not an unfortunate but a blessed strife which Christ did not come to end and forbid but rather to send and to incite in this world.

Of course, if no one would falsify God's Word, no conflict would be necessary, yes, it would be a serious, terrible sin. But flesh, world, and Satan are continually bent upon falsifying God's Word or the pure doctrine; and never has it been falsified in so many ways as just in our times so that now millions die the death eternal because of the poison of falsified doctrine. So dare we, can we be silent so as not to destroy earthly peace? For is it more terrible that temporal peace be taken from men, or rather that they be robbed of God's Word which alone can save their souls? Is this not worth more than the whole world? Does not Christ say: "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world," and thus also the peace of the whole world, "and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

Suppose, when in the fourth century the doctrine of Christ's divinity was attacked by Arius, that neither Athanasius or any other person would have fought this falsification; suppose, when in the fifth century the doctrine of man's conversion only through grace was assailed by Pelagius, that neither Augustine nor any other person would have fought against it; suppose, when in the 16th century the entire doctrine of Christ had been falsified by the papacy that neither Luther nor any other person would have fought against it; suppose, when at the end of the past century rationalism forced its way into the Christian Church, that no one would have fought against it. True, there would have been infinitely less strife and dissension in the world, but where would the pure Word of God be now? where would the Lutheran Church be now? where would the true doctrine of the way to salvation be now? All this would have disappeared long ago from the surface of the earth, and with it the salvation of countless people would have been lost.

Oh my dear friends, let us indeed sorrow and lament over this: that false teachers constantly assail the pure doctrine in our Church and thus are at fault for the conflict and strife in the Church; however, let us never lament but rather extol and praise God that he always awakens men who fight against those false teachers, for, I repeat, this pertains to "*the common salvation.*"

[3. Because this Conflict is One Commanded by God, and Therefore is Certainly *Blessed* by God in Time and in Eternity]

And yet, my dear hearers, the most important, the most irrefutable reason why we dare not nor cannot give up the fight for the pure doctrine in our Church is this: *Because this conflict is one commanded us by God and is therefore certainly one blessed in time and in eternity.*

Permit me now in the third place to speak to you about this and, therefore, grant me a few moments of your attention.

There are now many well-meaning Christians who say that naturally not all struggles for the pure doctrine should be rejected, one must at times rather most earnestly fight for it. Thus, for example, it was absolutely correct that Luther 400 years ago fought until death for the pure Gospel as courageously as a lion against the falsifications of the papacy. That is why his conflict

had such a result the like of which the history of the Church has never again pointed to. But now it is clearly time to end the fight for the pure doctrine in our Church and instead of *fighting against* one another *build with* one another, instead of the sword to seize the trowel. For what is the result of all the strife in our time? Nothing but greater splits and confusion.

As well as these preachers of peace mean it, they nevertheless are caught in a great error.

First of all, it is not true that the conflict for the pure doctrine in our Church in our times which has already lasted longer than 30 years has had only great splits and confusion as its result. Rather to God's honor it is to be said as a result of this conflict the Church of the Reformation with its golden pure doctrine has again risen among us as though from the dead, more than a thousand congregations have again rallied around the old pure confession of our Church; from our America the sound of the old pure Gospel has at the same time gone out into all lands and has won new confessors of the truth everywhere and gathered them around the good old banner of our pious fathers. Others, indeed thousands upon thousands who already were about to give up the old eternal faith completely were at least stopped on the road of error, some were moved more and more to return to the way of the truth they left. This present conflict has been rightly and gloriously blessed by God beyond all hopes, prayers, and understanding.

Suppose this were not true; suppose it seems as though finally all struggle in our days for the pure doctrine in our Church were completely without results and useless. We nevertheless dare not and could not give up this conflict. And why? Because the great God has commanded it in clear words. For who is it? who in our text so earnestly summons all saints, that is, all Christians through the Apostle Jude to "*contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*" It is the great God himself. For those holy men of God have spoken being moved by the Holy Ghost. What more do we need?

Which man, yes, which angel, will dare to say "No, do *not* fight" when God says "Fight!?" And when we are now fighting at the command of the great God, dare we ever fear that our struggle would be in vain? Never!

What God does or commands to be done cannot be anything but blessed in time and in eternity. For as the wise man Sirach writes: "Defend the truth until death, then will God the Lord fight for you." (Sir 4:33).

Oh, therefore, let us never listen to those who praise and extol the conflict of the Reformation for the pure Gospel but want to know nothing of a similar conflict in our days. God's command: "*Contend for the faith!*" applies to all times, also to ours. Let also our hearts be kindled by the fiery zeal with which Luther and his faithful helpers fought. Let us not like a coward surrender without a fight what they in hot conflict and with word, writing, blood, and tears gained by conflict, but faithfully preserve it and courageously defend it against all assaults until death. Let us consider no truth revealed for salvation as insignificant and agree to its falsification; for here applies: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Nor let us be concerned that for the sake of our conflict our names are rejected as malicious people.

Even Luther and his helpers once had to experience this, and today millions bless them after they are long since at rest in their graves. If today we show that we are not the degenerated but the

true children of the Reformation, some day when we also lie dust to dust, our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will bless us.

Granted that our name remains covered with disgrace before men until Judgment Day because of our struggle for the pure doctrine in our Church; nevertheless, if we remain faithful in the struggle, as truly as God is righteous and true, for the sake of Christ Judgment Day will be the day of our crowning and our entire eternity a festival of eternal victory and peace. Oh, what joy, what glory that will be when also we poor despised, scolded, and hated people will be received into the countless host of all the holy soldiers of God from Adam until the last faithful fighter who triumph before God's throne!

In conclusion I say to all of you:

*Then let us follow Christ, our Lord,
And take the cross appointed
And, firmly clinging to His Word,
In suffering be undaunted.
For who bears not the battle's strain
The crown of life shall not obtain. Amen*
(TLH 421, st. 5)
