

Stand Firm to the End

† snakes and doves (v.16)

† governors and kings (vv.17-20)

† children and their parents (v.21-23)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior we have, the only One we need, dear heirs of the Gospel:

One of the funny factoids out of Hollywood some years ago was that the popular American sitcom *Seinfeld* was not at all liked in Germany. They preferred reruns of *Hogan's Heroes*, which is strange because *Hogan's Heroes* was set in a fictitious version of Stalag 13 where American prisoners of war manipulated hapless German guards. Do you remember the corpulent Sergeant Schultz? He got out of every problem by saying, "I know nutting!" Why would Germans prefer a show that made fun of Germans? Purpose. *Hogan's Heroes* had more purpose than *Seinfeld*, "The Show About Nothing."

It's natural for most of us to ask, "What's the point?" And that's one thing I love about Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior. Before anyone could ask, He clearly stated His purpose. God's got a goal. As Jesus gives His marching orders to the first Christian Evangelism team, the Twelve Disciples, He sets His purpose clear and clean: **Stand Firm to the End**. He teaches through the lens of the Holy Spirit's camera today in three groups: **Children and their parents, governors and kings**, but He begins with...

† snakes and doves (v.16)

When it comes to setting aside our misconceptions, Jesus really has His work cut out for Him. He chooses Twelve Disciples; none of them are important people. They might think, "Let's get all the converts we can"; Jesus sends them only to *"the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* Marines and army scouts must always be prepared; Jesus tells His disciples, *"Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep."* Some might think, "No big deal if we don't listen!" Jesus says, *"I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town."* (vv.6-15) Jesus' followers always want good days and vain glory; He says, *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."*

If only we would listen to our Lord Jesus! Then we would not be so naïve to think that all religions are the same. Christ's sheep are surrounded by wolves. One example was the sale of indulgences in Germany. This practice not only exploited the poor out of their money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was costing them their souls. Churchmen like Tetzl were misleading Christ's sheep into thinking they could buy forgiveness. As a priest and professor charged with teaching God's Word, Dr. Martin Luther had to speak up. To debate these points was why Luther nailed the 95 *Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31st, 1517. For Christ's sake Luther wanted to be "wise as a serpent, innocent as a dove." But this brought Luther into conflict with...

† governors and kings (vv.17-20)

Jesus gives the same warning to Christians today. Some come to church thinking everyone should be nice to them. But why don't you come to be nice to everyone else? Did God not mean universal depravity when He spoke through His Apostle Paul in Romans 3? *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."* (3:10-12 NIV84) That's church people by nature too. We blurt things out or take things wrong because our hearts are selfish. We foolishly forget that Christ's church is not a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners.

Christ wants to reform our hearts today. Listen to Christ alone: ***“Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.”*** Jesus is exposing church and civil authorities who persecute His disciples. “Face it,” He says, “this will happen. ***“But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”***”

God kept His promises to a poor Augustinian monk who spoke out against abuses in the Medieval Church. But when Dr. Martin Luther dared to say that we are saved by Christ alone and that the Bible has authority over the Pope, Luther threatened the power of the Roman church. Safe passage was promised Luther for trial before church and government at the Imperial Diet at Worms. But that did not guarantee a fair hearing at the Diet. All Luther asked was to be corrected from Scripture. But this was rejected, and the only choice Luther was given was to recant all his writings. Luther replied:

*“Your Imperial Majesty and Your Lordships demand a simple answer. Here it is, plain and unvarnished. Unless I am convinced of error by the testimony of Scripture or by manifest reasoning (since I put no trust in the unsupported authority of Pope or councils, since it is plain that they have often erred and often contradicted themselves, I stand convinced by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's word. I cannot and will not recant anything. For to act against our conscience is neither safe, nor open to us. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”*¹

For that Luther was declared an outlaw and placed under the papal ban. Anyone who killed him would have the blessing of the Pope. If not for God’s gracious protection, Luther’s witness would have gotten no further than that of John Hus who was burned at the stake a century before for saying many of the same things as Luther. Before **governors and kings**, we triumph in Christ alone.

✠ **children and their parents (v.21-23)**

Martin Luther noted: “When a person accepts the Word of God, the Gospel, let him think nothing else than that he in that hour comes into peril with reference to all his goods, his house, home, farms, and meadows, his wife, children, father, and mother, also his own life. When danger and misfortune then strike him, it will be so much easier for him, since he thinks: I knew very well before that it would happen thus.”² Luther caught this clearly in his “Battle Hymn of the Reformation”: *And take they our life – goods, fame, child and wife – let these all be gone! They yet have nothing won. The kingdom ours remaineth.* (TLH 262) God tests our hearts and our faith in Him through **children and parents**.

Who could stand at all, much less **Stand Firm** with Jesus **to the End** except by the miracle of preaching *By grace alone, By Scripture alone, By faith alone?* Jesus warns God’s family: ***“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”***

It’s because Jesus died for all that we love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us – in church, in government, in family. Wherever Christians have fled persecution, they’ve spread the flames of the Gospel like water on an oil fire. It’s awesome to know God loves you for Jesus’ sake. It’s wonderful to confess: *Jesus died for all and Jesus died me!* With **the End** so near in the endless bliss of heaven, today is the day to **Stand Firm**. That’s why Martin Luther sent that famous letter to his son Hans describing heaven like a beautiful park where kids can climb trees and ride ponies. God always holds the glories of heaven before us. In glory with God, nothing else will matter but Christ and Christ alone. God grant us His grace! Amen.

¹ Adapted from: http://www-personal.ksu.edu/~lyman/english233/Luther-Diet_of_Worms.htm

² Kretzmann, *op. cit.*, NT I, p. 59, quoting Luther (3, 1079).