

# 40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

## DAY 27 – The Church of Hypocrisy.

*Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Hebrews 4:14-16

I hope that yesterday's study did not leave you a bit paranoid about what you can and can't do in church next Sunday? Maybe if it helps you curtail a critical spirit then that is a good thing. But I don't want people to think that worship is some kind of idol-infested minefield and that stepping on one of these is gonna be like landing on a snake in snakes and ladders.

The answer lies in the understanding of "appropriation". The way in which humans are related to God and how we have appropriated the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection. Appropriation is not the completion of God's work, but the acquiring of the benefits of God's work in Christ is God's gift from first to last.

So that in all its actions in the world, the church must confess that in both word and deed, it is dependent from first to last, on God's action. In order to emphasise this point, the Reformers, over and against the Roman Catholic church, insisted that in its worship, in its liturgical action, the stuff it does, that neither priest nor congregation should be confused with this action of God.

Phillip Melanthon (1497-1560), Luther's off-sider, who helped draw up the Augsburg Confession, says "*the chief worship of God is the preaching of the word . The same may be said of the sacraments which should be administered according to the Gospel and only then are they really sacraments.*"(Article 7 paraphrased).

So, why is the Gospel so central to these acts? Simply because by defining these things in terms of the Gospel, i.e., the Word of God, we turn our attentions away from it being about ourselves. So in Article 8 of the Augsburg Confession, Melanthon writes, "*Despite what hypocrisy may exist in the church (and among people), the Word and the Sacraments are always valid because they are instituted by Christ, no matter what the sins may be of the one who administers them.*"

So, we can breathe a small sigh of relief. Because we all know of our own hypocrisy. How often is it the non-musical person who complains about the music? Or the person unable to string a coherent sentence together who whinges about the sermon? Or the person who arrives late and leaves early who complains about how communion was prepared? Or the person who puts a lousy 10 bucks into the plate who complains that the guttering is leaking?

Christ perfects our worship. So for Luther and the Reformed church as a whole, it is not the church, but the Word of God himself through the preaching and the right administration of the sacraments by which Christians are begotten and born, not the church. We, who are broken, hypocritical and often supercritical, find reassurance that church's life and work can be understood from beginning to end as created, sustained and perfected, by Christ alone and the Spirit.

And thank God for that!!

### PRAYER

Redeeming God,  
There is no salvation  
Except salvation by Jesus Christ's actions.  
While we forever seek to find a way of it being about us,  
About our actions, about our perceptions,  
We loose the release that comes from knowing we offer nothing  
But to hear Your Word  
And abide in Your Word.  
Thank You for perfecting our lives and our response to You.  
In the name of the Word made flesh, Jesus. Amen