

DAUBING WITH UNTEMPERED MORTAR. Ezek.13:10b.

The reason for choosing this caption is found in the fact that it affords a striking parallel to the situation which now obtains in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod on account of the anti-Scriptural "opinion" on the validity and the obligations of a Scriptural betrothal. The orthodox Lutheran Church, for more than four hundred years, has taught that a betrothal, entered into according to the directions and implementations of the Word of God, is the very initiation of the married estate in the sight of God and of the Church. It is a teaching which is intimated in the Lutheran Confessions, plainly and emphatically set forth by Luther, and contained also in the explanation of the Small Catechism which is in use in the Missouri Synod.

The plain teaching of Holy Writ has been disavowed in an "opinion" rendered by the faculty of the St. Louis Seminary, the date of this document being May 24, 1949. And now, having built a wall which, from the very outset, had a very shaky foundation and promptly developed dangerous breaches, the wall is being daubed by the venerable teachers of the Church with untempered mortar, which means, according to the original text, with a cheap grade of whitewash. We might say, in a somewhat blunt way, that preconceived notions are being supported by a tailor-made interpretation. This is the sad situation which confronts us at this time, since an "apology" has been presented which is supposed to settle the controversy which has arisen over this profanation of clear Scriptural teaching.

Now, even as simple Ananias in Damascus was called upon to instruct the man who afterwards became the great missionary and teacher of the Gentiles, so at this time a simple Bible student, armed with the Word of God, may presume to offer a correction, both of the false "opinion" and of the "statement" or apology which is now available. And while we recognize the learning which was employed in the "study of the question, which extended over a period of years" this fact, far from excluding the possibility of error, makes its existence all the more palpable. Here are a few points for the earnest Bible student to keep in mind.

The venerable faculty states "that the Bible nowhere says that there has to be a betrothal before a valid marriage can be contracted." This we cheerfully grant, since the Bible clearly teaches that the state of matrimony begins with a rightful betrothal. The mutual promise made by the contracting parties initiates the state or condition of being married. From the moment that a valid promise is being given, the man and the woman concerned are husband and wife in the sight of God. Eve was Adam's wife, flesh of his flesh, as soon as they were brought together by God, through mutual agreement, Gen. 2:23,24, before they had marital intercourse, Gen. 4:1. After the betrothal of Rachel to Jacob, and before the wedding ceremony had been held, Jacob demanded of Laban, "Give me my wife," Gen. 29:21. It is clear that the negotiations between Eliezer, acting for Abraham and Isaac, and Bethuel and Rebekah, the latter being the woman sought in marriage, established the betrothal, the marriage then being consummated when Isaac formally took Rebekah, and she became his wife, Gen. 24:67.

The venerable faculty states: "God has nowhere commanded that there should be betrothal prior to marriage." We reply: The reason for that is quite simple, for in the eyes of God the two acts, betrothal and marriage, are coincident, the only difference being that a valid betrothal establishes the right and fixes the condition, while the marriage ceremony, if any, as the laws of the state provide, officially sanctions cohabitation. If we should apply the principle, as stated by the venerable faculty, to other teachings of the Bible, we should soon find ourselves in a quandary, since, for example, monogamy is not commanded by God, except in the case of a pastor, 1 Tim. 3:2, and is merely presupposed in a number of passages. Now, since polygamy was practised throughout the Old Testament times, are we to conclude that the absence of a prohibition makes polygamy valid for all times?

The venerable faculty argues that the adoption of a certain rite in the Old Testament does not make this rite binding th the New Testament and ~~at~~ the present time. The error of the venerable professors at this point lies in the fact that a rightful betrothal in the Old Testament was not a mere rite, but an occurrence arranged by God Himself and implemented by many additional statements throughout Holy Writ. This argument of the venerable faculty is closely connected with the next "principle" presented in their "apology," namely the claim that the current Catechism teaching in use in the Missouri Synod concerning betrothal is false because the cases cited are to be placed under the Ceremonial Law, as it pertained to the Jews only, and not to the Moral Law, as it pertains to all men. But this argument is invalidated by the simple fact that rightful betrothal, according to the divine will, was in vogue since the days of Adam and Eve, long before the Ceremonial Law was given. It has been correctly stated that matrimony was instituted before the Fall of man, before the first promise of the Savior for fallen men, before any Ceremonial Law of a shadow of things to come (prophetic of the promised Savior, and matrimony was instituted and established as being initiated by a rightful betrothal.

The venerable faculty declares that Lutheran theologians have never stated that betrothal constitutes (or establishes) affinity. This point offers no difficulty whatever when we remember that Lutheran teachers have always observed the difference between the establishment of the state of matrimony by a valid betrothal and the marriage ceremony required by the state in order to establish the marital relationship. In other words, the best Lutheran teachers have always distinguished, as Scripture does, between the possession of ~~certain~~ rights and the exercise of those rights.

The venerable faculty insists that Lutheran theologians have always shrunk back from designating the breaking of an engagement as adultery. But in this case also the distinction just noted must be kept in mind. Moreover, we must here keep in mind that the "committing of adultery" here spoken of does not imply carnal intercourse, but a breaking of the marriage tie (Luther: Der bricht die Ehe, that is one who breaks a valid engagement thereby dissolves what is a marriage in the sight of God).

The venerable faculty endeavors to build up its arguments for the denial of a valid state of matrimony initiated by a Scriptural engagement by declaring that our social structure differs from that of the people of God in the Old Testament. The "apology" does not distinguish between the essential requirements pertaining to a valid betrothal and certain incidental factors, such as the payment of a dowry, etc. But all such argumentation is against the facts which we have before us in Holy Writ, the book which was given to men by the eternal, all-wise, and omniscient God, who certainly was able to legislate for social conditions of all times. This is not "binding consciences unduly and wrongfully," but it constitutes the proper obedience to the God who wants marriage to be honorable in all.

In spite of the warning which the faculty has attached to its "apology," it is to be feared that the dissemination of such views, unsupported as they are in Holy Writ, are bound to work havoc in our congregations. Even now the ways of the world, in the matter of engagements broken without valid reasons and in the prevalent custom of chain engagements (like chain marriages) are making frightful inroads into the morals of our young people. In the final analysis the question narrows down to an attack upon the organic foundation, Holy Scripture itself. If we are no longer in a position to say, Thus saith the Lord, with reference to a truth so plainly taught in Holy Writ, it is more than likely that other teachings will soon go by the board.