



## GOD'S ANSWERS: Session Five

*What does this mean? The role of God's truths and our culture's worldviews in shaping our thoughts.*

### Opening Prayer

Almighty God, Your Word is truth. Keep us steadfast in Your Word even as the evil one seeks to whispers his lies into our ears. Keep us with Your Son who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

### God's revealed truth – Augsburg Confession Article Five

#### Read Aloud:

**“To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this. Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel.”**

#### **Q: How is this Truth undercut in our world?**

*A: Allow for some discussion about this question in general, then focus the thoughts on the fact that this truth is so contrary to how many unbelievers and even those who profess to be believers look at the faith. Forces inside and outside of the Church have tried to downplay the role of the Church in how God delivers His grace to us. Even well-meaning movements within the Church which seek to warn against faithless worship have caused people to forget how God delivers His gifts. Outside the Church, people are encouraged to think that any moving experience is just as fulfilling as experiencing God's grace in His Church. Everyone is invited to create whatever path they want to find some type of spiritual fulfillment or experience. Choose one or more of the examples on the next sheet entitled “Cultural Attempts to undermine this truth” to help show how these lies continue to deceive. Then return here to finish this session.*

#### **Q: How is this truth revealed in the Scriptures. Why does it matter?**

*A: Read the following verses that speak about the means which God uses to deliver to us the gifts Jesus won for us at Calvary. Emphasize that while we should come to church simply because God commands it, He has given us an even more compelling reason to come. He invites us to come in order that faith might be awakened and then sustained by Him week after week. There is nothing Satan wants more than to keep God's people away from His Word and Sacraments.*

- *Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*
- *John 20:22-23: "He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."*
- *1 Corinthians 10:16: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"*
- *2 Kings 5:1-14: "Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me." But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (Note how God nearly always works through simple means (in this case a dirty river) to give His extraordinary gifts.)*

### **Closing Prayer**

Almighty God, You have given us a great treasure in the gathering of Your People around Your Word and Sacraments. Help us never to leave or forsake this gathering where You have promised to give us life in Christ. Amen.

## Cultural Attempts to undermine this truth:

### Example 1:

Play the clip from Oprah's online web show Super Soul Sunday found at <https://youtu.be/ZGbJyfJjblA>. Note how Oprah's guest, Reza Aslan, a religious scholar, suggests that experiencing God is simply a matter of personal preference and decision. He contends that there is no specific way one must experience God. They must simply choose something that feels right to them. Talk about how cruel it would be for God to exist and want to have a relationship with humanity but not reveal how one is to experience Him. Remind those being taught that God is experienced where He says He will be found, in His Word and Sacraments.

### Example 2:

Play the clip of an Expedia Superbowl Commercial found at <https://youtu.be/hAxW6rRI55k>. Note how this video suggests that the best experiences in life are simply found by doing the things you are most passionate about. Note especially how the phrase "find your religion" is overlaid on a video of fans gathering together at a soccer game. Note how many people do think that such experiences would be far better than going to church. Admit we might all feel this way until we realize that in Church we get to step into the presence of the Almighty God and receive the gifts of His Eternal Son Jesus.

### Example 3:

Play the clip from respected bible teacher Charles Stanley found at <https://youtu.be/V4ocm31RJ7g>. Note how his emailer desires that God would speak personally to her, apart from Scriptures, about normal every day decisions. Stanley encourages such a desire by rattling off times where he feels that God has spoken to him about items as inconsequential as which size of turkey to buy for a meal. While we do not want to deny that God does in the Scriptures occasionally speak directly to people, it is not to be thought of as something better than God's normal way of speaking through His Word to His people. Teaching otherwise has led many people to not value gathering in Church because they would rather wait at home to receive some direct personal revelation instead.

### Example 4:

Show or describe the meme below that has been shared on Facebook many times. Note how this surely well intentioned quote by its nature downplays what God does in the gathering of His people. There is a trickle of truth running down this canyon of deception. It is true that your act of going to church does not turn you into a Christian. No work of ours gives us our identity as Christians. But it is precisely in going to church that one is made a Christian. First at the font. Then in the assembly. Later at the table. God does His work of making and keeping us Christians in His Church. It is why the phrase "I believe in the Holy Spirit" is followed quickly by talk of the Holy Christian Church in the Apostles' Creed. As Luther says, "the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith." We are only made Christians by the Gospel and the gifts of God. And those are given out in the Church. So in this sense, it is precisely by going to church that you are made a Christian and remain one.

