

What's Wrong with the Scouts?

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The responsibility which God has placed upon us as parents and as Christian leaders in His Church is to teach and bring up our children to worship only the true God and to follow only His Word. For that very purpose we have the distinct privilege as members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to have in our congregations organizations known as the Lutheran Girl Pioneers for the girls and the Lutheran Pioneers for the boys. Because we have such organizations in our churches, people, even our own fellow Christians, may approach us and ask, "Why the Pioneers and not the Scouts? The Scouts have a really wonderful program. The kids get together and have lots of fun and they learn a lot. It seems to me to be a waste of time to have the Pioneers. It seems to be just a duplication of the same thing." But we have to ask ourselves, are the Scouts really the same as the Pioneers or is there a distinct difference? Most assuredly when we view the scouting movement in light of God's Holy Word we find the answer to a well-asked question: *What is Wrong with the Scouts?*

Now there are many ways in which a person could answer this question, but for our purposes today we will consider four reasons why the scouting program is contrary to our faith and religion and why we Lutheran Christians of the Wisconsin Synod—feel compelled to have our own youth organizations. To begin with:

I. Scouting breaks the First Commandment by insisting on an all-encompassing, nondescript, and thus nonexistent god.

The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2:8a, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith." Faith, of course, has to believe in someone or something and to accept certain things as the truth. The Christian has faith in God, the true God, and His Word as the truth. Now scouting demands and confesses a reverence and belief or faith in god, but who that god is is nowhere defined in Scout literature. His identity is veiled in such expressions as "The Great Master of all Scouts," "The Ruling and Leading Power," "The Source of Life," etc., or just generally as the god of all faiths and beliefs. But the true God of Scripture, the Savior God revealed in Christ Jesus, is never mentioned in the Scout manual, the Scout oath, laws, benediction or prayer. The reason, of course, is obvious—it would offend those who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, who do not acknowledge Him as one with the Father. It would offend the Jewish Scout or the Christian Scientist Scout or the Jehovah's Witness Scout or the Unitarian Scout and the like. Scouting teaches that all can worship God and be reverent to Him regardless if they call Him Jesus Christ, or Jehovah, or Allah, or Buddha, or yes, The Great Master of all Scouts. In its oath and in its law, it demands a reverence towards any god, regardless of who that god may be. Thus it finds itself under the thundering condemnation of the First Commandment as we have it recorded in Exodus chapter 20:2-3, "I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me." God will not have us worship any god, any nonexistent god. "You shall have no other gods before me." We are to worship only the true God.

Nor does scouting permit the Christian to mention Jesus Christ in the Scout oath, benediction, or law. And this is where the great issue lies. It is not possible for the Christian to have more than one God. It is impossible. There is only one God and that is the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three persons in one Godhead, the Holy Trinity. That is the only true God, and the worship of any other god is committing idolatry. A person who believes, worships, and prays only to the Father to the exclusion of the Son or to the exclusion of the Holy Ghost is committing idolatry. Such a person does not really believe in the True God.

So, too, is the person committing idolatry who believes, worships, and prays to a nondescript all-encompassing god of all religions and faiths—be he called the Great Master of all Scouts as the scouts do or the Grand Exalted Ruler of the Universe as the Mason Lodge does. Such persons who pray to such nondescript

gods are committing idolatry. Jesus said, “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him” (John 5:23b). Such persons do not honor the Son. They exclude Him and so they do not honor the Father. As a result they do not honor God either. They do not honor the true God. Scripture says, “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (I John 4:2-3). The Spirit of the scout movement does not confess Jesus Christ as God. It allows all faiths to belong, and so it does not permit the Christian to confess Jesus Christ in such an organization, for we said it would offend those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus also said, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven” (Matt. 10:32). We are to confess Jesus Christ as our Savior before men. If Jesus be God, then let us say so. Let us acknowledge Him as God, one with the Father; and if He is not God, then let’s say that He is the biggest farce that there ever was, that He is a hoax. But Jesus is God, the second Person of the Trinity, the Triune God—the only true God, and we must confess only the true God. If we deny Him, by reciting Christless oaths, Christless prayers, Christless benedictions, He must also deny us. If we must deny Him in order to show respect to someone else’s faith, or religion which the scouting movement impresses upon its members, then Jesus will also have to reject us and our faith as false. For any time that we would reject Jesus, our faith would be false. We are to confess Him before the world, and to join such persons in their Christless oaths, prayers, and benedictions is not confessing Christ before the world. In joining them in their Christless oaths, prayers, and benedictions, we would, therefore, join them in breaking the First Commandment of God. The scouting movement not only breaks the First Commandment of God, but:

II. Scouting breaks the Second Commandment when it insists that children take a needless and false oath.

God does not want us to make needless, thoughtless and uncertain oaths and pledges. Scripture says, “Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your ‘Yes’ be yes, and your ‘No,’ no, or you will be condemned” (James 5:12).

Concerning oaths, Jesus said, “But I tell you, Do not swear at all” (Matt. 5 :34) . What Jesus was saying here was that the Jews were swearing falsely. In order to put on an air of piety and make their statements seem to be true, they would swear before someone, “I swear by the gold in the temple or by the pillars.” They were, of course, hypocritical and false oaths, but since they didn’t use the name of God in the oath, they thought that they didn’t have to keep their promises. They didn’t want to be held to the truth. We can swear, but we are to swear in God’s name—not by anything else. And when we call upon God, when we are swearing in God’s name, we are to call upon His name to witness to the truth that what we are saying is the truth and not a lie. But to do otherwise is to do contrary to Scripture. Instead Jesus said, “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matt. 5:37). But to be a good Scout one must make an oath or promise. They swear “On my honor...” Don’t children in the scouting movement learn something which is more than the yes, yes and the no, no of which Jesus is speaking here and of which Jesus demands? The answer is a simple and an emphatic Yes. Scripture says, “When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow” (Ec. 5:4).

The sad part of the Scout oath is that it is a false oath that no one on his own can keep, and you become a pleasureless fool in God’s eyes. Each Boy Scout promises that he will do his best to do his duty to God, and each Girl Scout promises that she will try to serve God, that each will either obey or live by their respective Scout laws, and that in the case of the Boy Scouts each will do their best to keep themselves morally straight. The Girl Scouts have enough sense, at least in this last point, to have eliminated this idea of being morally straight from their oath. Be that as it may, as a whole no one can and should make such kinds of pledges, promises, or oaths. To do so is a lie. It is a false oath and it is the oath of a fool. The reason why this oath is the oath of a fool and is so damning is because it further leads one to rely on natural man’s religion of work righteousness. It leads one to believe that you can by your own strength and power obtain favor before God through what you do. Thus we see that:

III. Scouting teaches work righteousness apart from a person's faith in Christ.

The Scout is told: "Do a good turn daily." Why? Out of love for his or her Savior who redeemed them? or as a fruit of their faith in their Savior? No! The Scout is told that by doing this he or she is fulfilling the promise to do their duty to God: This is work righteousness clear and simple—the very sin Jesus condemned in the Pharisees of His day. From the Scriptures we learn that we are dead in our trespasses and sin and that we are completely unable to try to serve God or do our duty to God, to keep His law or to keep ourselves morally straight. Scripture says, "They have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Ps.14:3). Even the Apostle Paul had to admit, "What I do is not the good I want to do." If St. Paul had to admit that he could not try to serve God or to do his best to do his duty to God, how can we? But the Scout does, every time he or she recites their respective oaths or promises. And, of course, these oaths teach children that they can serve God or do their duty to God whether they believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior or not, whether they believe in the true God or not. In fact, in the Boy Scout manual it is stated that one's conscience can give a child the power to accomplish this, "It is your conscience that makes it possible for you to distinguish between right and wrong, that helps you follow the right trail through life" (*Boy Scout Handbook*, 1979 printing, p. 525).

In John 15:5, on the other hand, we are told, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Without Jesus we can do absolutely nothing. We cannot please God without Him. Certainly one's conscience cannot move you to please God. All one's conscience does is to remind us of sin, and that even imperfectly. It was never intended by God to be an underlying force to enable a person to do one's duty to God. And yet the Girl Scout believes that she can serve God or the Boy Scout believes he can do his duty to God without faith in Jesus Christ. This is impossible. Scripture further says, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). Even that which we do do is because of God working in us the faith to bring forth fruits of our faith as evidence that we believe in Jesus Christ. Without God working in us this desire we cannot even do that. Nonetheless, in scouting the good Jewish child or Moslem or Buddhist, yes, even an atheist is led to believe that he is doing his duty to God or she is serving God, even though he or she rejects the truth that Jesus is the Savior and that He is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, yes, that He is true God. This we know is contrary to the holy Scriptures. Finally:

IV. Scouting teaches us to respect false doctrines and false religions.

In the Boy Scout law (*Scout Master Handbook*, 1981 printing, p. 11 and p. 41), it states that the Scout "respects the beliefs of others." In explanation to that law the Scout is told that it is his "duty to respect others whose religion may differ from ours, even though we do not agree with them." In a Girl Scout publication (*Cadette Girl Scout Handbook*, 1975 printing, p. 10) it states that the Girl Scout is to, "respect the beliefs of those who differ from you." The definition of the word "respect" from Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary is, "to notice with special attention," "to consider with some degree of reverence." We cannot, we dare not respect, give special attention to, or reverence the false beliefs and false doctrines of others. We cannot respect the idolatry and Mary-reverence of the Roman Catholic Church. We cannot respect the convictions of the Moslem, the Hindu, the Buddhist, or the modernist who denies that Jesus is God. Now, it is true that everyone has the right to believe what they want to believe. This is the religious freedom that we have in this land of ours, but that does not mean that I have to respect their false beliefs and teachings such as those of the Jew or the Christian Scientist or the Jehovah Witness and the like and go along with their anti-Christian and anti-Scriptural views. On the contrary, I will do all in my power to lead them to the truth so that they may learn of Jesus Christ as their Savior, that they may learn Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life, that they might know the way of salvation through faith in Him, that they might know Him as the precious Gift of God and through faith in Him be saved unto eternal life. This is my obligation to God. I cannot respect, therefore, the beliefs of others, when Jesus Himself didn't, nor did the prophets such as Elijah or Jeremiah or Isaiah or the Evangelists or the Apostle Paul himself. They condemned false doctrine in no uncertain terms.

The Apostle Paul also said, “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:8). We must fight for the truth and not give error the same respect that God’s truth alone deserves. As a Christian, I cannot respect false religious beliefs; and if I do, I am actually saying that all religions are good and equal, that all nonexistent gods are on the same par with God, that all doctrines that people believe as the truth are on the same par with the truths of God’s Holy Word and that we are to believe them. In so respecting the beliefs of others I am ultimately denying my Savior and His Word and am thereby rejecting the Gift of God. God’s Word has plainly told us, “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (Rom. 16:17). God has also warned us in His Word, “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring the teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (II John 9-11).

Scouting does not deserve a place in our Lutheran Church or in our homes any more than any other “do-good,” “work righteous,” “false teaching” religious group which tells man that he can gain God’s favor by what he does.

In conclusion, let me say that there are many wonderful things in scouting. But to subscribe to the scouting program we would also have to subscribe to false anti-Scriptural and misleading teachings. We cannot do this without denying the Word of God or without denying the gift of God, Christ Jesus and His wonderful blood-bought salvation. Thank God, therefore, as Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, we have the Girl Pioneer and Pioneer groups in our congregations who are not robbed of this precious truth. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).