

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fifth Sunday After Trinity, July 20, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 20, 270:5, 575, 421, 522:5-7.

Lessons: Jeremiah 9:23-34, 1 Corinthians 2:9-16, Matthew 7:12-27.

Sermon Text: 1 John 2:3-6.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We recognize the two main teachings of the Bible as Law and Gospel. Summarized in three words, the Law of God “shows our sinfulness”. Summarized in three words, the Gospel of God “shows our Savior.”

Jesus tells us in John’s Gospel ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** (John 14:6) There is no other way to eternal life. It is the Holy Spirit who must work faith in someone to believe that.

After the Holy Ghost has worked faith, then what? What do we do with that knowledge and our faith while we are on earth? Then follows what scripture calls sanctification.

Sanctification is holiness; it is holy living; it is doing and saying and thinking what God wants of his people because the Holy Spirit has done his work in us. His people, believers, are those of whom Paul writes ***“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”*** (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

Many confuse sanctification with truly being a Christian. Many think that it is because of holy living, because of doing good works, because of doing “the best that I can do” that God will take us to heaven. But that is not at all true. The Word of God is especially clear about that: ***“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.”*** (Ephesians 2:8-9) Holy living, sanctification is the result of faith. It is a fruit of faith. We ask with Jesus: ***“Sanctify [us] by the truth; your word is truth.”*** (John 17:17)

Make no mistake. Obedience is a fruit of faith, and

OBEDIENCE IS A FRUIT OF LOVING GOD

- 1. We know that we have come to know him, if we embrace and obey God’s instruction and commands.**
- 2. The one who does not embrace and obey God’s commands does not have God’s truth.**
- 3. But the love of God is brought to completion in the one who walks as Jesus walked.**

Obedience is a fruit of loving God. It is the results of loving him, and we aren’t able to love him all by ourselves. We confess that “I cannot by my own reason or strength come to Jesus or believe in him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.” Obedience is a fruit of faith.

Today John is telling us “Now in this way we know that we have come to know him, if we embrace his instruction.”

He has just told us in these contrasting statements that

“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, [then] we lie and do not live by the truth.” “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, [then] we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

“If we claim to be without sin, [then] we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” “If we confess our sins, [then] he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

“If we claim we have not sinned, [then] we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

And he has emphasized ***“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*** (1 John 1:7 through 2:2)

Having told us and emphasized how our sins are paid for, he goes on to explain how it is that we have evidence of our faith in Jesus Christ.

He says ***“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.”*** Obedience is an unmistakable part of true faith. It is evidence of faith. True faith is always accompanied by a believer's willingness to submit to the will of his God. True faith accepts God's authority over one's life. Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians: ***“the man who loves God is known by God.”*** (1 Corinthians 8:3)

When John speaks of knowing God, it includes all of these ideas: to acknowledge God in his ways with man, to recognize his claims upon man, and to understand his law with the intention of obeying it.

The evening Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper he told his closest followers as he was praying to God, his Father: ***“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*** (John 17:3) Obviously it is important to know the teachings of Christianity. It is also important to believe them to be true. But unless that "head knowledge" and "head faith" become part of the attitudes and actions of our lives, they are hypocrisy. This is a terrible problem. All people are vulnerable to self-deception, and we all need John's reminders. John's point is not that any sinful deed shows that your Christian faith and knowledge are dead. His point is that true faith is always known and evidenced by words and deeds of obedience to God's will. His point is that we must not settle for theoretical Christianity but living, visible Christianity.

We can lead lives that honor God because God works in us. We can show growth and improvement in our obedience to God's will. As Paul said, ***“I can do everything through him who gives me strength”*** (Philippians 4:13). John put it this way: God's love is made complete in our obedience to his Word.

Think of the damage done to the reputation of the Christian church when believers' lives are no different from pagans', or when their deeds directly contradict their so-called beliefs and teachings. Think of the damage done to a church's reputation when the lives of any Christians do not reflect what they say they believe.

“The man who says, ‘I know [God],’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Anyone who claims to know and believe in God but does not embrace, obey, and follow Jesus' commands and instructions is a liar. He or she does not have and does not live in the truth.

Hypocrites, believers in name only, should beware! Whoever says, “I know him,” and does not keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in this person. God wants a genuine keeping of his will. He abhors sham and hypocrisy. A mere outward profession of faith, a mere crying, “Lord, Lord,” may make the desired impression upon men, especially since genuine good works may be imitated. God examines the condition of the works – and especially the heart behind those deeds – very closely. He knows the motive which prompts every word and deed of every person. The hypocrite may deceive others, and perhaps even deceive himself but his efforts to deceive God are vain and foolish. The hypocrite, the mere head- and mouth-Christian, is a liar, he does not really know what truth is; he has gotten so far away from honest Christianity that all his pretended efforts avail him nothing.

Truth, the truth of God's Holy Word is divine and objective. It is not subjective as some might claim, as in saying “that's just your opinion”. The truth of God's Word becomes subjective in the sense that it belongs to you when you believe it and then live a sanctified, holy life, that is, a life that is lived according to God's laws and thus pleases God. Truly in such a one the love of God is brought to completion.

John goes on: ***“But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”*** Whoever embraces God's Word has God's love truly made complete in him.

This gives comfort, and this is how we know we are in him. The one who says that he abides in God ought to walk in the same way as Jesus walked.

If we keep, observe, hold on to, hold dear, and pay careful attention to Jesus' commands and instruction, then we are in him and he is in us. John repeats that later: *"Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."* (1 John 3:24) If we give heed to, attend to, take to heart, and treasure Jesus' commands and instruction, then we are in him and he is in us. The instruction John speaks is to be treasured, preserved, protected, guarded and taught in its truth and purity.

Whoever embraces God's word, truly in such a one the love of God is brought to completion. In this way we know that we are in him. The one who says that he abides in him, ought to walk in the same way also just as Jesus walked.

What is it that the Christian embraces? The Law of God, and the Gospel of God. But because of sin clinging to our lives it isn't comfortable to embrace the Law of God in our lives. It shows that we are sinners and that makes us uncomfortable. It should. And what does it mean to embrace the Gospel of God? It means to know and believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins. It means to show that Jesus Christ died for my sins, and to live as though we are dead to sin.

Faith in Christ the Savior establishes and confirms the fellowship which we have with him and with our heavenly Father. The result is a living knowledge of Christ. A mere cold, external knowledge about God, a mere head knowledge of his essence and properties, is not true faith and will bring no fruit. A genuine knowledge and faith in God is that which acknowledges God and trusts in him as the heavenly Father who was reconciled to us in Christ and who loves us for Christ's sake. If we live in accordance with the commands of this heavenly Father, if we do what his holy will desires of us, then we may take this fact as evidence that we possess the proper knowledge of God. Our life as Christians is the mark of our fellowship with God.

Of the true, honest Christian John writes: But whoever keeps his Word, in this person the love of God is truly completed; in this we know that we are in him.

True love of God flows out of the knowledge of God and faith. This love finds its expression in this, that the Christian "keeps" the Word of God, that we do what we know to be his will; that we refrain from everything that is contrary to his will. If this is our attitude and if this is brought out in our entire conduct, in our whole life, then our love toward God is really growing and presents unmistakable evidence of the right condition of our heart. A real Christian life is the mark of fellowship with God. It shows that our life is bound up with him, that we obtain all our strength from him.

It follows, then, as John puts it: whoever says he abides in God is also under obligation to conduct himself just as Jesus conducted himself. The fellowship with God into which we enter by faith is not a matter of an hour a week. It is not a matter of a few hours or days, but is a living, permanent power in the life of the Christian. The Christian wants to remain in fellowship with God. For this reason he takes the life and conduct of Christ as his example and tries with all the power granted him by faith to follow in his steps. Christ's life is the pattern, the model. Thus the entire Christian life is obedience to God's command. This obedience results from true fellowship with God and is the mark and evidence of faith. And everything is based upon the certainty of the forgiveness of sins.

Lord, let us live our obedience to you! Amen.