

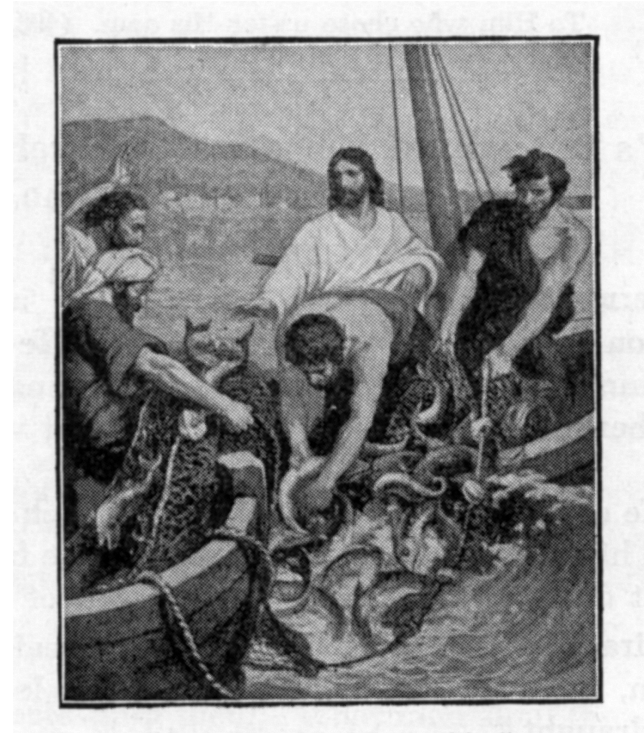
SATURDAY, AUGUST 1: 2 CORINTHIANS 6:11-7:16 TRINITY 8

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The great promises St. Paul speaks of deal with the Lord promising to dwell within the baptized and be their God, so that the baptized belong to God and God belongs to them. The second promise is that God will be a Father to them, making them His sons and daughters. These are great promises indeed! The Lord promises to be with us, to dwell within us by faith so that we belong to the Lord! He promises that we are His sons and daughters, co-heirs with Christ of all the heavenly blessings! All of this He promises us in His Word and all of this He gives us in Holy Baptism.

Therefore, since we are baptized and have received such great promises, St. Paul urges us to cleanse ourselves from all the world’s filthiness of body and soul. Baptism calls us to daily put the Old Adam in us to death with all his sinful desires. All manner of lusts, ambitions, avarice, greed, and self-worship are to be killed off by daily repentance. Not only is the flesh to be mortified, but the new man is to be nurtured, cultivated, and grow by faith in God’s promises, so that we grow in holiness in the fear of God. If we kill the Old Adam but the new does not rise up in his place, the Old Adam will only grow stronger. Let us, therefore, daily recall these great promises God made to us in Holy Baptism, that we repent, believe the Gospel, and grow in good works to serve our neighbor.

Lord God, grant that we may daily live in your baptismal promises. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**TRINITY 5—TRINITY 8
(JULY 6—AUGUST 1, 2015)**

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Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity

X. Of Ordination and the Call.

If the bishops were true bishops, and would devote themselves to the Church and the Gospel, they might be allowed, for the sake of love and unity, and not from necessity, to ordain and confirm us and our preachers; nevertheless, under the condition that all masks and phantoms of unchristian nature and display be laid aside. Yet because they neither are nor wish to be true bishops, but worldly lords and princes, who will neither preach, nor teach, nor baptize, nor administer the Lord's Supper, nor perform any work or office of the Church, but persecute and condemn those who being called discharge this duty; for their sake the Church ought not to remain without ministers.

Therefore, as the ancient example of the Church and the Fathers teach us, we ourselves will and ought to ordain suitable persons to this office; and (even according to their own laws) they have not the right to forbid or prevent us. For their laws say that those ordained even by heretics should be regarded and remain as ordained, as St. Jerome writes of the Church at Alexandria, that at first was governed in common by the bishops through the priests and preachers.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article X

FRIDAY, JULY 31: 2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-3:3

TRINITY 8

Sin and grace. Repentance and forgiveness. Confession and Absolution. The Christian life is bound up in these realities. We see this in today's reading as St. Paul absolves the sinner who he excommunicated in 1 Corinthians 5. This man had been put out of the church to show him the severity of his sin. The excommunication apparently worked because St. Paul writes in today's reading that "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow." The excommunication had caused this man to sorrow over his sins, confess them, and seek to amend his sinful life. He had sorrowed. Now it was time to absolve him and welcome him back into the body of Christ.

The Lord desires that all sinners sorrow over their sin, regret it deeply, and desire to amend their lives. He will write in chapter 7:10, "Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." Godly sorrow is what this penitent sinner possessed, because it led him to seek the absolution. If the church had left him to stew in his sorrow, or had they demanded works of satisfaction beyond repentance and faith, they would have surely driven him to worldly sorrow and eternal death. Praise be to God that he allows us to sorrow over our sins that He might lift us out of our sorrow by the absolution given by Christ.

Heavenly Father, grant us godly sorrow and repentance over our sins so that we may mourn them, but then seek Christ in true faith for the forgiveness of all our sins. Amen.

St. Paul writes that two things happen in their affliction. First, that though they feel the sentence of death hanging over their heads, they learn to daily trust in God who raises the dead. So it is with our sufferings. In our tribulations and crosses the Lord wants to lead us to faith in His precious promises in Christ. Though we might despair of our very lives because of hardship, Christ uses our sufferings to show that His strength is made perfect in weakness, just as it was during the days of His humiliation.

Second, St. Paul writes that they are afflicted so that, as they receive heavenly comfort, they might turn around and comfort their hearers. The comfort Paul offers to those who are being afflicted, the comfort which he receives from the God of comfort, is not a generic comfort. It is the comfort of the Holy Ghost working through the Word of God to give us Christ. The word ‘comfort’ is the same word used to name the Holy Ghost in St. John’s Gospel, *Paraclete*. The comfort which the God of all comfort offers to Paul in His tribulation is that of the Holy Ghost, who calls to his mind the things of Christ. This is the comfort that Paul, and all the faithful, offer to each other in the hour of utmost need. It is the comfort that, as our Lord suffered while in the flesh, so must His baptized people. But as Christ was vindicated by the Father on the third day, so all the baptized will be vindicated from their sufferings, if not in this life, then on the Last Day at the resurrection of the dead.

God, grant us the holy comfort of Christ for us. Amen.

It is clear from Romans 4:3 that neither the circumcision of Abraham’s descendants, nor our Baptism are a work of ours that makes God owe us. Forgiveness is ours just as it was Abraham’s: through trust in the promise our Judge made to forgive us in connection with Abraham’s Descendant, Jesus Christ. Circumcision then, and Baptism now, must be seen as God’s own work, by which He connects us with this promise.

False teachers would make our faith into a work. One sort denies the Third Article of the Creed, saying that they “have decided to follow Jesus,” when we know from Scripture that we “cannot by [our] own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ [our] Lord or come to Him.” Another sort teaches that you have already been forgiven before trusting in Christ—that God no longer imputes sin to any unbeliever—and ridicules the Bible’s teaching of our being declared righteous by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. They say that if you are not already righteous before trust in the promise, you believe that you are making God save you by your ‘good work’ of faith. By teaching this, they show that they do not believe faith to be what the Bible says it is: the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–10) that is given through the message concerning Christ (Romans 10:17). Yet, St. Paul does not write that Abraham believed God had already counted him righteous and therefore was counted as righteous, but that Abraham trusted in the promise of Christ who was to come and the work He would do. And through this God-given, promise-created confidence, Abraham was declared righteous.

Depending on the translation of the Bible you just read, the first verse may have said “we have peace with God” or “let us have peace with God.” This is, in Greek, a matter of whether a copyist heard a long or short ‘o’ sound in an unstressed syllable. It actually makes no real difference, though. We have peace from God through faith in Christ, and by that faith we are to live in peace toward God. That is clear from the rest of the chapter, regardless. We have access to the Father and look to the day when we live in the perfect reception of His love in glory. Therefore, we glory in tribulation, as well, rather than grumbling against Him or wondering if He looks at His believing children with peace. For those justified by faith, whatever trouble we suffer is for the development of believing attributes, as it always turns us back to God’s mercy in Christ.

Verse one must be seen in connection with verses six through ten: justification through the blood of Christ is what faith gives, so that we are saved from the wrath that abides to this day upon the world. The death of Christ, made ours by the Holy Spirit through His gift of faith, took us enemies of God and made us, instead, His children and heirs. That is what reconciliation is: being brought to God and transformed from the dead to the living by His Word’s giving us faith in Christ’s death in our place. That is what Christ’s own preaching was doing in the world before the crucifixion and it is what the preaching of those of whom He says, “He who hears you, hears me” continues to do today, reconciling the world to God.

“Let all that you do be done with love.” These words could be the key phrase in a romantic comedy. They could be etched on home décor to give the place a more comfortable feeling. And if taken apart from their context of the Christian faith, they would be just another kitschy catchphrase. When St. Paul says, “Let all that you do be done with love,” he is not exhorting us to do ‘random acts of kindness’ for people; neither is he teaching us to give out ‘thinking of you’ cards. He is calling us to mortify our sinful flesh and serve our neighbor according to the Commandments.

By nature we do not want to serve our neighbor (service to neighbor is how we love them). By nature we want to serve ourselves. We want to be the one being served. Our flesh even feels entitled to it. The Christian is called to daily repent of this selfish and self-seeking attitude, and then mortify those desires. We are to kill our selfishness so that we can truly love our neighbor as we love ourselves. That love then seeks to do good works for our neighbors, and good works come only from the Commandments. We do not get to choose our own good works, rather God etches them in stone so that we know what is pleasing to Him and beneficial to our neighbor. We help them to improve and protect their possessions and income. We defend their reputations. We protect their marriages. We do all within our power to help them in every bodily need. This is how we let all that we do be done in love.

Lord God, grant us Thy grace so that we may put to death our self-serving desires and by Thy grace love our neighbor according to Thy Commandments. Amen.

“Let all things be done for edification.” In today’s reading St. Paul continues to reign in worship practices which only serve the individual rather than the body. This is the perennial temptation of the flesh, to serve oneself rather than others. This is true in our private lives, but it is also true corporately. Preaching in another tongue, that is, another language, can be beneficial for the Church as long as there is a translator. If there is no translator, the language remains unintelligible and benefits no one’s faith. Imagine if your pastor began chanting in Hebrew or if He preached His sermon in Greek. That chanting (even if it was God’s Word) and that preaching would not benefit anyone for the strengthening of their faith.

Five intelligible words that speak of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and the new obedience of faith are far better than ten thousand words no one can understand. This preaching, which is prophecy, speaks clearly of Christ and His salvation for everyone’s benefit. St. John writes in Revelation 19:10 that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” So all prophecy has to do with Jesus, His perfect life lived in our stead, His death died with all our sins imputed to Him, and His resurrection to make justification available for all who believe and trust His atoning work. St. Paul commands that the message of Christ be proclaimed clearly for the edification of all the Church. May it always be so among our churches.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we give You thanks that You have preserved the pure Gospel in our churches up till now, and pray that You would preserve us ever Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

Perhaps our daily lectionary intended us to begin with verse instead of verse twelve, and there is a typo in the hymnal. Regardless, you will certainly want to go back and begin reading there, because skipping over the power of Holy Baptism in verses three through eleven certainly makes verses twelve through eighteen even more daunting!

How will you refrain from obeying the lust of sin and letting it reign in your mortal body? Only if you know that being “not under law, but under grace” means that you have already died to sin in Christ, that in Holy Baptism you have been united to Jesus in death and resurrection.

Walking in newness of life is not a matter of command, but of gift. This walk is not something where you beat yourself over your failures and resolve to do better in your own strength. Instead, it is where you again and again reckon yourself as God does: dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. So considering yourself, you condemn the works of death that your flesh has led you into and look to God again for forgiveness. Daily life for you is such dying and rising, such drowning the Old Adam through mourning over your sins and trusting in Christ alone for forgiveness, through which the New Man daily arises to live before God in purity, rendering the parts of your body as tools for God to use to work His righteous deeds—by grace alone, through faith alone!

Heavenly Father, grant that we do not present ourselves to sin as its obedient slaves, but as those who have been delivered from it through Baptismal faith, grant us to arise daily to new life until we arise to live with you in Heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Oh, how glorious the sixth chapter of Romans is! We, the Baptized, those whose confidence is in Christ alone, are dead to sin and alive to God and rendering our bodies to His use as the instruments of righteousness! The seventh chapter starts out the same, but then St. Paul tells us about his own life. And we know that we are no better.

What am I like? I know that the law is not sin, but the sin that dwells in my flesh takes the law as its cue to drive me to do, say, and think the very opposite of what the Law says! Even as a Christian, my flesh drives me toward what consumed my whole existence as a non-Christian.

In verse 15, when St. Paul says that he does not “understand,” this is not some admission of a gap in his theological knowledge, but of how absolutely senseless his desires and conduct are. They are as utterly senseless as standing in the Paradise you have been given without any merit of your own and eating of the one tree from which you have been commanded not to eat. As a widow to sin who is now married to Christ-the-Perfect-Husband, why does his flesh spurn Christ and adulterously go after others? He finds himself no better than his forefathers for whom the Lord had conquered all the nations’ gods, yet who went after the conquered idols to worship them.

O Lord, as St. Paul did, we know Your Law is good and right, so we cry for Your salvation—wretched people whose own flesh keeps betraying us—and trust that it is ours in this same Jesus Christ, into whose death we have been Baptized. In Him, Father, strengthen us to stand against the devil, the world, and own flesh. Amen.

St. Paul uses the metaphor of a human body to describe the body of Christ, which is the Church. It may seem silly that Paul describes feet wanting to be hands and ears wanting to be eyes, but this picture of our human nature is quite accurate. The sinful flesh does not want there to be any distinctions within the church. The flesh claims to want equality among all the members of the Church when in reality it wants interchangeability. The flesh wants there to be no distinction between parts so that all can have a part or a function of the Holy Ministry. The flesh argues that without everyone being a leader of some sort, they have no real part in the Church. This sort of interchangeability will only result in discord and disorder within the body of Christ, just as it would in a human body.

The Church runs contrary to the desire of the Flesh, but it does run like a properly functioning human body. Not all are pastors. Not all are teachers. By virtue of our baptism, all are priests, able to offer the sacrifices of praise to our God. Not all are called to be Pastors. All are kings, but not everyone is called to rule over the household of God. We are not to strive for the office and position of another. Instead, we are to seek the “more excellent way” St. Paul mentions at the end of the chapter, which is love for neighbor that involves using our vocations to serve others as members of the same body.

Lord God, curb our sinful flesh’s covetousness for the things given to others. Forgive us so that we might daily serve our neighbor in love born from true faith in you. Amen.

This passage has to do with headship. Not long ago this topic was never discussed, much less debated. But because of the “feminist movement,” and subsequent blurring of the sexes, Paul’s statements are considered not only outdated, but out of touch with present-day reality. Although it is true that customs change, the principle that St. Paul lays down is still in effect, that of headship.

The world’s conclusions are wrong because they read 1 Corinthians with pre-conceived ideas. The world would equate “head” with “boss” or “dictator.” The truth of this role could not be more different. Whereas the husband does take on the role of leader, that role is to be one of sacrificial love. Nowhere is this better outlined than in Ephesians 5, as husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her. If such a role is properly assumed, the wife’s role of submission is a pleasant one.

So when Paul says in verse 3 that “the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God,” he is hardly making the point that Christ is “less than” or “inferior to” the Father. Paul says later in this same book: “Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). We see that same word “subject” used in Luke 2:15, even as Jesus submits to His earthly father and mother.

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, may we always adhere to the Biblical understanding of headship and submission. Help us to properly understand and apply this doctrine, remembering its model of Christ and His Church. Amen.

According to our birth nature and according to our flesh, we are inexcusable--judges who condemn in others the very things we would do ourselves. Yet, in His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, God has led us to repentance. A hard and impenitent heart collects—as if riches—the abundance of wrath in the Day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. But by bringing us to sorrow over our sins and to trust in the Christ as our sole Deliverer, God has stored up for us glory, honor, and peace.

In that Day the Lord will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel: to those who refuse to have their lives transformed by the hearing of the truth, continuing to do evil, there shall fall indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. Even as those who would not live within their circumcision, so the denier of his Baptism finds it of no avail in that Day, and his evil thoughts, words, and deeds shall be exposed unto his condemnation.

Yet, in that Day, too, we who do not seek a self-justification, but who are brought by the Truth to trust in the same, will receive judgment in which our sins are covered by the blood of Christ, because by His grace we are not “Jews outwardly,” glorying simply in the performance of Baptism or any work as if it were our own, but “Jews inwardly,” who trust that the Lamb of God has been offered up for us and that in Him our sins are washed away.

Lord, grant that we not give cause to the unbelievers to blaspheme You, but that we may always humbly trust in Your mercy alone, for the sake of Christ alone. Amen.

“Whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God.”

What, then, if the authority resists the authority? What if an official exchanges his proper office for the improper? What if he abdicates his position as “God’s minister to you for good,” and becomes one who seeks to do evil?

The Bible gives the example of King Saul, who wished to destroy the one God anointed to succeed him—David—and of Jonathan, David’s best friend, the son of King Saul. When Saul sought to kill the anointed one, his son had the information that would have let his father accomplish this sinful mission, but Jonathan wisely withheld this information.

In so doing, Jonathan was not breaking the commandment to honor father and mother, but keeping it: as Adam should have honored his wife by keeping her from sinning in Eden, so Jonathan seeks his father’s honor by keeping him from this sin, in the hope that he would repent over time. Neither as king nor as father did Saul have the right to demand David’s death, so Jonathan did not recognize his authority in this matter. In every other matter, though, he did recognize his father and king.

David himself honored Saul: when he had opportunity to kill Saul, he did not take it (because Saul was still God’s king), but let him know that he easily could have killed him, so that Saul might repent and serve under God.

So must we obey God rather than men when they would command what God has not given them authority to command. Indeed, there the godly must oppose such a tyrant—as is especially clear in a constitutional republic like ours. Yet, in all else, “let every soul be subject.”

There is perhaps no better passage in all Scripture that teaches the proper understanding of Closed Communion than today’s text. Consider verses 16 and 17: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.”

Holy Communion is not only a Means of Grace, delivering to us forgiveness of our sins, but is also a testimony of our fellowship with one another—a close communion. And because it is reserved for those who share this “closeness,” it is also called a closed communion, which excludes those not of our confession.

At times, people have questioned this practice. Some people consider refusing communion to a visitor from another faith similar to denying a morsel of food to a starving traveler. “Why do you Lutherans have such an exclusive practice? Who are you to judge? Isn’t my participation just a matter between God and me?”

To commune at a church’s altar is the highest expression of confessing oneness (1 Corinthians 10:17). Therefore, it makes little sense for someone of another denomination to want to participate in a “communion” which, in fact, does not exist. Such a person, by his presence at the rail, is in fact renouncing the teaching of his own church by such participation. It is hypocritical, and gives offense to the Lord to pretend there is oneness when there is not, or that unity really does not matter.

Prayer: Dear Lord, may we always remember that the Supper is Yours. May we support our faithful pastors who have the privilege and responsibility to be faithful stewards of Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

Living daily with our sinful flesh, it is easy to become desensitized to hell. Part of the fallout of that affliction is that we neglect the urgency of witnessing. Some of us spend a good bit of time sitting on our hands and closing our mouths, waiting for our neighbors to say to us: “Could I go to church with you”?

Now, this shame may make you slink down in your seat. It may even motivate you to try a little harder in your outreach. But shame and fear do not last very long. Pretty soon the scare tactic wears off. Even God’s thunder and lightning at Mt Sinai did not hinder some of the Israelites from making golden calves. There has to be a greater motivation and a more lasting compulsion for us to tell others about Christ.

So what is that “something?” Let us look at St. Paul. He was compelled by the Gospel--that Christ died and rose from the dead for the sins of the world, including Paul. Paul recognized that since Jesus also died for him, all those rotten things he had done to Christians, such as dragging them out of their homes and rejoicing at their deaths, were all paid for by Jesus. That is what God promises in spite of our many failings. Jesus says: “I still died for you. I still love you in spite of your sin.”

Prayer: Gracious God, guide our lips that we may bring people the liberating news of the Gospel. Help us to always be eager in our witness to the salvation we enjoy. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

The Fifth Commandment

Thou shalt not kill.

We have not completed the discussion of both spiritual and temporal government, that is, divine and paternal authority and obedience. But here we go forth from our own house to our neighbor's, to learn how we should live with respect to one another, everyone for himself toward his neighbor. Therefore God and government are not included in this commandment, nor the power which they have to kill. For God has delegated His authority to governments to punish evil-doers instead of parents, who aforetime (as we read in Moses) were required to bring their children to judgment and sentence them to death. Therefore this prohibition pertains to individuals and not to government.

This commandment is now easy enough, and is often treated, because we hear it annually in the Gospel of St. Matthew (5:21sq.), where Christ Himself explains and sums it up—namely, that we must not kill, either with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help or counsel. Therefore it is forbidden to everyone to be angry, except those (as we said) who are in the place of God, that is, parents and government. For it is proper for God, and for everyone who stands in His stead, to be angry, to reprove and punish, even on account of those who transgress this and the other commandments.

But the cause and need of this commandment is that God well knows that the world is evil, and that this life has much unhappiness; therefore He has placed this and the other commandments between the good and the wicked. As now there are many temptations against all the commandments, so the temptation in respect to this is that we must live among many people who do us wrong, that we have cause to be hostile to them.

As when your neighbor sees that you have better possessions from property, and more happiness from God, than he, he is offended, envies you, and speaks no good of you.

Thus by the devil's incitement you will have many enemies who cannot bear to see you have any good, either bodily or spiritual. When we see them it is natural for our hearts in their turn to rage and bleed and take vengeance. Thus there arise cursing and blows, from which follow finally misery and murder. Therefore God like a kind father anticipates, interposes and wishes to have all quarrels settled, that no misfortune come of them, nor one destroy another. And in fine He would hereby defend, liberate and keep in peace everyone against all the crime and violence of everyone else; and has, as it were, placed this commandment as a wall, fortress and refuge about our neighbor, that we do him no bodily harm or injury.

—The Large Catechism, Part I, §180–185

Here we are warned to not judge a fellow Christian, who is also a servant of God, for less than clear sin. For to Christ, the Master of you and your fellow believer, you will have to make account. God is Master and to Him alone all believers are responsible. Paul includes himself in the camp of those who are strong, because as a Christian now, the old Jewish food taboos no longer applied. We see clearly that Paul is not discussing conduct that in the light of Scripture is clearly sinful, but conduct concerning that which Christians may legitimately differ (in this case, food regulations).

With regard to such matters, decisions should be guided by a conscience formed by the *agapē* love of God for us all. Christ so valued the weak brother as to die for him. Surely the strong Christian ought to be willing to make adjustments in his own behavior for the sake of such brothers. To do otherwise runs the risk of causing your own understanding of Christian liberty to be spoken of as evil. To exercise freedom without responsibility can lead to evil results. We who are strong in Christ, and thus Christian freedom, are to bear the cross for the sake of the weaker brethren. Not merely to tolerate or put up with, but to uphold lovingly. We should not insist on pleasing ourselves. Not that a Christian should never please himself, but that he should not insist on doing what he wants without regard to the scruples of other Christians.

Living out our Christian faith is more than just “knowing and following the rules.” Our sanctified life must consist of more than a checklist indicating “I’ve done this, I’ve avoided that.” We must ask ourselves: “Why have I done this? Why have I avoided that?” And it is not always sufficient to give the answer: “Because the Bible tells me so. It tells me what to do and not to do. And when I mess up, they’re called sins of omission & commission.”

We are called to remember the points of our Catechism more deeply than simply labeling sin. What is at the heart of the Commandments? Love. God’s Spirit and holy love enables you to reciprocate His love for you, and makes you want to love your neighbor, because God’s love can not help but spill out in all directions. Without love, we “do this” and “not that” out of constraint. We may look squeaky clean, like a good Pharisee, but we are motivated by the wrong reason without His love.

Motivation by love also carries our lives one step further. In actions that are neutral (adiaphora), we must also analyze those actions for their impact on our neighbor. We live public lives. We live in neighborhoods, we have workmates beside us, and schoolmates around us. With “love” as the proper motivation for our actions, today’s text makes greater sense. St. Paul says in verse 9: “But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.” We must constantly be aware how our actions may be interpreted. Are we leading people to the faith, or discouraging them away from it ?

Prayer: Dear God, grant us the wisdom and awareness to live lives that encourage others to want to know more about the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the midst of a lengthy treatise on divorce, today's reading contains a section that can easily be lost. In verses 29-31, St. Paul addresses the *eschaton*, or end times: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away."

Note that in only three verses, five times Paul uses the conditional "as" followed by the negative "none" or "not." These strong and repeated admonitions certainly are not to be taken to the extreme, as if we are to abandon our wives or refuse to mourn over the loss of a loved one. Rather, Paul's point is this: we should never cling to things of this world at the expense of the world to come. Each and every day we must examine our hold of the temporal, making sure we are able to let it go at any moment. It is so easy to let our fingers close over our possessions that we are often not aware how tightly we cling to the things of this world.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, let us hold fast to things eternal, heeding the words of Luther's hymn: "And take they our life, goods, fame child, and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won; the kingdom ours remaineth." Amen.

Saint Paul sets an example for us all as disciples of Christ, for an apostle's plans are not his own, to make or alter as he pleases. The apostle is an instrument in the hands of the Trinity. God has given him grace to be a minister of Christ Jesus, and the offering which his priestly ministry presents to God (Gentiles won to the obedience of faith) is sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the apostle cannot move westward, to Rome and Spain, until God's business has been finished in the East, until he has fully preached the Gospel of God where God wants it preached. Only then can he come to Rome in the high-hearted assurance that he comes in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.

Paul invites the saints in Rome to join in the joy with the called apostle by requesting two services of them. He asks that their prayers accompany him to Jerusalem, where he has cause to fear the hatred of his staunch enemies, the unbelievers in Judea, and the suspicions of Judaic Christians. He wishes, moreover, to be sped on his journey by the churches of Rome.

Thus the Gospel creates the apostolic, missionary church. We too should be willing to allow our lives and plans to be used by God for the building up of His kingdom in the way and time of His choosing, not our own.

Paul began the body of his letter to the Roman Church with an affirmation of the power of God at work in the Gospel. The whole letter has set forth the past and present workings of that power for salvation. Paul closes with praise of the God of power. He is a God at hand, able to sustain the Romans in their conspicuous and responsible position, able to strengthen them for the greater tasks which Paul's coming will open up for them. His Word is near them.

Paul's Gospel itself is that Word. It can strengthen them because Jesus Christ is preaching in Paul's Gospel. Jesus Christ is the disclosure of God's mystery, the revelation of His long counsels of salvation which worked among His people of old. In Christ, that plan is now disclosed and is working on the stage of universal history to the ends of the earth. All nations shall know the Christ. The prophetic writings of the Old Testament are the witnesses to what the eternal God has revealed in Christ. Thus men will be brought to the obedience of faith.

The church must be on guard against those within her ranks who cause divisions and put obstacles in her way. And not just any divisions and obstacles, but those which were contrary to the teaching they had learned. The Romans did not need to fear; whatever apostolic task they undertook would not be undertaken in vain. They needed only to bow with Paul in adoration before the God whose wisdom guides all history to His goal, to the glory of His grace. Whatever serves that glory cannot fail.

Today's text has some interesting implications. Paul writes in verses 9-11: "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-not even to eat with such a person."

This rebuke seems to refer to advice given by Paul elsewhere. Apparently he had warned, in a general sense, to stay clear of the immoral. There are two wrong ways to interpret that statement. The first concerns the unbelieving world. It would mean fleeing the world and becoming a hermit, which is clearly not the best way to live or to witness to the heathen. The other approach relates to the believing world. Every Christian has the responsibility to address the wayward brother or sister. Without outside intervention, it is wishful thinking to believe the impenitent will "wake up and smell the coffee." Out of love for our fellow Christian, we should be compelled to address the sin, lest he or she die in impenitence.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You call us to be "lights on the hill" in this ever-darkening world. We also have the responsibility to address those in our Christian family who have wandered from the faith by word or deed. May You ever grant us the awareness and wisdom to faithfully serve in both roles. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Article XXVI.

It has been the general persuasion, not of the people alone, but also of such as teach in the churches, that making Distinction of Meats, and like traditions of men, are works profitable to merit grace, and able to make satisfactions for sins. And that the world so thought, appears from this, that new ceremonies, new orders, new holydays, and new fastings were daily instituted, and the teachers in the churches did exact these works as a service necessary to merit grace, and did greatly terrify men's consciences, if they should omit any of these things. From this persuasion concerning traditions, much detriment has resulted in the Church.

First, the doctrine of grace and of the righteousness of faith has been obscured by it, which is the chief part of the Gospel, and ought to stand out, as the most prominent in the Church, that the merit of Christ may be well known, and that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven for Christ's sake may be exalted far above works. Wherefore Paul also lays the greatest stress on this article, putting aside the law and human traditions, in order to show that the righteousness of the Christian is another than such works, to wit, the faith which believes that sins are freely forgiven for Christ's sake. But this doctrine of Paul has been almost wholly smothered by traditions, which have produced an opinion that, by making distinctions in meats and like services, we must merit grace and righteousness. In treating of repentance, there was no mention made of faith; all that was done was to set forth those works of satisfaction, and in these all repentance seemed to consist.

Secondly, these traditions have obscured the commandments of God; because traditions were placed far above the commandment of God. Christianity was thought to consist wholly in the observance of certain holydays, fasts and vestures. These observances had won for themselves the exalted title of being the spiritual life and the perfect life. Meanwhile the commandments of God, according to each one's calling, were without honor, namely, that the father brought up his family, that the mother bore children, that the Prince governed the Commonwealth,—these were accounted works that were worldly and imperfect, and far below those glittering observances. And this error greatly tormented devout consciences, which grieved that they were bound by an imperfect state of life, as in marriage, in the office of magistrate, or in other civil ministrations; on the other hand, they admired the monks and such like, and falsely imagined that the observances of such men were more acceptable to God. ...

Wherefore our teachers must not be looked upon as having taken up this matter rashly, or from hatred of the bishops, as some falsely suspect. There was great need to warn the churches of these errors, which had arisen from misunderstanding the traditions.

—The Augsburg Confession, §1–11, 18–19

THURSDAY, JULY 16: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-31

TRINITY 6

Christ crucified is foolishness to Gentiles and offensive to Jews. Greeks and Romans were sure that no reputable person would be crucified, so it was illogical and irrational to think that a crucified criminal could be the Savior. Also, the claim of Jesus' resurrection was considered foolishness by the Gentiles. The Jews expected a triumphant, political Messiah, not a crucified one. Also, the teaching that deity became incarnate and died was repugnant to the Jew.

In today's text, Jews and Greeks represent mankind, especially mankind at its "best," the religiously favored and the intellectual elite. These highly favored people according to earthly standards are spiritually and eternally lost because of the very things the world favored in each group. In contrast, those less favored by worldly standards are redeemed and blessed with eternal life purely by grace. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

In the church not many are wise according to worldly standards, not many are powerful, not many are of noble birth, for God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. So it is for us, none of us have been united with Christ and salvation because of something in us, but because of something graciously done for us and to us by God in Jesus Christ.

When Paul came to Corinthian he resolved to present only Jesus Christ and His vicarious death and resurrection. He makes Christ the sole subject of his teaching and preaching while he is with them. He does not use vain oratory devised to entertain and impress audiences, but neither does he neglect study and preparation. Though Paul says he does not come with lofty speech or wisdom, Paul's letters reveal a great deal of knowledge in many areas of learning. His eloquence is apparent in his address before the Areopagus in Athens. Paul's point is that, unless the Holy Spirit works in a listener's heart, the wisdom and eloquence of a teacher are ineffective. Paul's confidence as a preacher did not rest on intellectual and oratorical ability, as did that of the Greek orators (entertainers). Paul's preaching was marked by the convincing demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The secret, or mystery, was once hidden but is now known because God has revealed it to His people in Christ, and thus to unbelievers it is still hidden. God's wisdom found in Christ Jesus will cause every believer to share eventually in Christ's glory. This points to the truth of what it means for every Christian to confess Christ before men by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are called to simply confess with the greatest knowledge and mastery of Scripture possible, and leave the conversion of sinners to the Means of Grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Who sees anything different in you? What marks you as something special? You all have received teachers as gifts from the ascended Christ; you cannot therefore boast of any one of them as your private claim to distinction. This is a timeless warning spoken by the Apostle to all the church throughout time. Paul goes the way of Jesus the Crucified, the way which the worldly of every age reject as folly, the way of weakness, deprivation, dishonor, and death, loss of life for Christ's sake in order to find it in Him.

With biting irony Paul indicts all who are "called to be saints" for leaving the way of their sainthood—Jesus' beatitudes upon the poor, hungry, and persecuted no longer apply to the arrogant. Paul jars the Corinthians out of complacent misuse of their Christian liberty by calling for immediate and rigorous church discipline. The Christian life is to be a perpetual celebration of liberation from sin, not an indulgence in liberty to sin. In their arrogance they are no longer the meek to whom Jesus promised the earth as their inheritance, no longer imitators of the meek apostle. Paul points to the fact that they have left the cross behind them in pursuing the mirage of wisdom and power.

In calling on Christians to be imitators of himself, Paul is summoning all to be imitators of him as beloved children to the one and enduring source of wisdom and power and life, to the gospel. This is a plea that they again become the "apostolic" church. Imitation involves acceptance of the apostolic Word and submission to apostolic authority as well as emulation.