

"But I Say Unto You"

Matthew 5:27-41, Trinity Sunday II

June 9, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....Today's sermon is a continuation of Christ's Sermon on the Mount given to His disciples. Last week we spoke of the Beattitudes, this week Jesus rebukes the false teachings of the Pharisees heard by the disciples and He teaches us a proper understanding of the law, namely a spiritual. For example, in the first portion of His words, Christ condemns the sin of lust, but we know His good will is that every married husband and wife be content with the spouse God has given. In the second place, Christ rebukes the evil of false swearing by men, and His good will is that we always speak the truth in love. In the third and last place, God forbids us from taking revenge, from letting anger and hatred rule our hearts. His good will for us is that we patiently endure the many injustices in this world, knowing God has a place of rest for us above, an eternal Sabbath that fades not away. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory." As we run this race in patience, let us continually look to our blessed Savior who has won all battles for us. "Faithful *is* he that calleth you, who also will do *it*."

I. Lust, marriage, and contentment. Ever since the fall, our sinful nature lusts after all God has forbidden. While the Lord gave to Adam and Eve a good and wholesome sexual desire for one another in marriage, after the fall these desires became corrupt. In order to uncover these sins, Jesus thus teaches the true nature of adultery which is sexual lust for someone besides spouse. It is not just "Thou shalt not commit adultery" but "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell." Those who allow lust to rule their hearts will indeed perish in hell. While we live in a human society, and therefore we cannot help seeing people and looking at them, we should mortify or put to death that sinful lust within. We fight this temptation by prayer and the Word of God. And since we are flesh and blood, it is impossible to avoid lust altogether. Nevertheless each incident is much like the devil shooting an arrow at us. When an arrow pierces us, we do not let it lodge there or take root, lest it slay the faith of our heart. Instead we tear the arrow out and cast it away by confessing the sin to God, washing ourselves clean in the blood of Christ. It is written, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In order to correct the false teachings of the Pharisees regarding marriage and divorce Jesus now says, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." Since

the Pharisees had allowed lust to rule their hearts, they simply made divorce an easy matter. In this manner they essentially legalized their lust. Jesus therefore stated God allows divorce only for the innocent spouse when the other has been unfaithful. To divorce when there is no adultery, is to commit adultery in the second marriage. Also if an innocent person enters their first marriage with an adulterer who divorced, this marriage is adultery. And so in all this we see God protects the faithful person who is free to remarry, but the adulterer is always guilty. While this is true, we also don't necessarily destroy second marriages which are adulterous. Sometimes there is repentance and remorse, and sometimes there are children in the second marriage. What is important is that the adulterer confesses their sin to their first spouse, and puts their faith in Christ. Let us always remember all husbands and wives are adulterers at heart, and it is the marriage of Christ alone to His Church which forgives our adultery and preserves our marriage.

Marriage then is the God-given remedy to avoid fornication. Concerning the evils of lust and the blessing of marriage Luther wrote concerning other women, "Is she beautiful? As far as I am concerned, she is not very beautiful. And even if she were the most beautiful woman on earth, in my wife at home I have a lovelier adornment, one that God has given me and has adorned with His Word beyond the others, even though she may not have a beautiful body or may have other failings. Though I may look over all the women in the world, I cannot find any about whom I can boast with a joyful conscience as I can about mine: 'This is the one whom God has granted to me and put into my arms.' I know that He and all the angels are heartily pleased if I cling to her lovingly and faithfully. Then why should I despise this precious gift of God and take up with someone else, where I can find no such treasure or adornment? Thus I could look at all women, talk with them, laugh, and have a good time with them, without experiencing any lust or desire and without letting any of them seem so beautiful or desirable to me that I would be willing to transgress the Word and commandment of God. Though I might be tempted by flesh and blood, I would not have to consent or let myself be overcome; but I would have to battle against it like a knight and conquer through the Word of God, living in the world in such a way that no evil could corrupt me and no allurements could seduce me into adultery." (American Edition of Luther's Works, Vol. 21)

II. Good and evil swearing. After exposing the sin of lust, Christ now forbids evil swearing. In the Old Testament there was the sure command, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths." This means whenever a believer takes an oath before God, he must surely keep it. Recently for example we had two young men take their confirmation oaths. This was a good oath spoken to the glory of God. Likewise God allows us to take an oath in a court of law, or when we get married. This is good swearing and not evil nor forbidden. But what Christ addresses here in Matthew five is sinful swearing

over unimportant matters, or where the promise is not kept. That is why He says, "Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool." Luther here explains the Pharisees "had developed a distinction between oaths that were valid and those that were not, thus allowing people to swear freely. For example, if someone were to swear by heaven or by Jerusalem or by his head, those would be little oaths and not very binding—just so long as he did not invoke the name of God."

Rather than swearing by these lesser powers, Christ says, "let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Generally speaking in most situations, we only need answer Yes, or No, and we must always tell the truth. A perfect passage concerning our vows is found in Ecclesiastes 5:4-5. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." While we should be sure to keep our vows, there are at least a few times when we are not necessarily bound by the vow. Children or youth for example sometimes make a foolish vow without their father's blessing. Such are not bound. There are also times where an adult takes a vow, but it is contrary to God's Word, like Luther's vow of celibacy. Later when Luther understood the nature of marriage and its blessing, he did a good work by taking the holy vow of marriage

While God forbids evil vows, and His blessing is upon our good vows, let us always remember our vows never save us, for every promise of man is tainted with sin. There is one vow however that does save us, and that is God's vow or promise, the Holy Gospel. In the Holy Gospel, God swears to us that for the Christ's sake, our sins truly are forgiven by God, put away forever out of God's memory. Every Gospel passage then which we find in the Bible, is God's vow, a solemn promise which can never be broken. Listen then to the good way Jesus swears and promises. Jesus swears, "I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." Jesus promises, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Likewise "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Our faith then inside us, is nothing more than an echo to these sure promises of God. His Gospel promise causes faith to promise in return, "I do so intend, with the help of God." Isn't it nice to know God's promises help us to keep our promise?

III. Turn the other cheek. Our final point for the day concerns justice, revenge, and the meek Christian spirit. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Christ here again is rebuking the false teachings of the Pharisees. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for tooth, was God's law for government. This was

crime and punishment. If the judges had rightly exercised God's perfect justice, most of men's evil would have been kept in check. What the Pharisees did however, was pervert God's law, namely they falsely interpreted it to say "God allows me an eye for an eye, and so if you hurt me, I can hurt you also." With such wickedness they gave their angry hearts license and permission to remain angry and do evil, rather than endure injustice by faith to the glory of God.

When Christ teaches "Resist not evil" and "turn the other cheek", He is teaching us not to seek revenge at all, nor allow anger to rule our hearts. Luther said Christians, "should have the attitude that if someone hits them on one cheek, they are ready, if need be, to turn the other cheek to him as well.... In other words, what [God] wants is a heart that will neither be impatient nor wreak vengeance nor disturb the peace." While God does not forbid us from taking our neighbor to court if they assault us or rob us, we would rather suffer loss than be angry or vengeful in return. Hence "if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have *thy* cloke also." In this way we teach the world that our faith is in God, His will and judgments. If they have wronged us, God will make it right in the end, and in the meantime we pray "Give us this day our daily bread....Thy will be done." While Christians then suffer many things wrongfully at the hands of the world, we know Christ is both our Champion and Savior, also our King. Since the victory is won, when "faith worketh by love" we endure all things here only so our angry enemies will be conquered by our good. Faith in Christ truly conquers all! Therefore "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." Go above and beyond what your neighbor asks or demands, until they are ashamed of all they've done. As Jesus endured all things to God's glory and for our salvation, so we by His strength endure all things to God's glory for the salvation of our neighbor. "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Amen