

THE CHURCH AT WORSHIP IS THE EPISTLE'S ILLUSTRATION

Hear the theme phrase from the Word of God for this twentieth Sunday after Trinity:

Submitting to one another in fear of Christ...¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

To whom was, and is, this week's section of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians written? Was it written to people in the Church or to the unchurched?

Is it written to sinners, or saints, or to both?

As this congregation has heard in previous weeks, this letter was written first to a church in the city of Ephesus, and then sent out to be read in churches around the world. It was not written for those who are outside the Christian congregation. Its words were to be, and are to be, proclaimed to those sinner/saints in the assemblies of our Lord Jesus Christ. From it, we are to discover that the Church at Worship is the Epistle's illustration of the congregation's members *submitting to one another in fear of Christ...²*

If one removes the verse numbering in our translations, we find that the words *submitting to one another in fear of Christ³* may be connected either to the sentences that come before it, or with those that follow. Or, they can be viewed as making up a connecting link between that which comes before and that which follows. Today, given the cutting before us, we are focusing on that which comes before as we draw out the treasures of the Word from the little phrase: *submitting to one another in fear of Christ.⁴*

The repeated emphasis on the context of the passages and the Holy Spirit's intended

¹ *Ephesians* 5:21.

² *Ibid.*

hearers is given to remind this assembly of sinner/saints that these words are to be used in the Church. They find their divine power as this congregation, assembled by God Himself, centers in worship on our Lord Jesus Christ, remaining attached to Him through His Word and Sacraments. The words of this letter were intended for public use, to be read out loud into the ears of God's people. This is done so that, joined by Him through His means, they, we, would carry them into our congregational life, and into the world.

As with many of the passages of the Epistles, each and every "you" in this section is for the Body of Christ in the place where it is being read. You as individuals are being addressed as a community, joined by the Word into one Body, whose head is Christ our Lord. That is how the end phrase of this week's cutting from scripture became our theme for the week. Hear it again: *Submitting to one another in fear of Christ...*⁵

Those words ring out as almost foreign into ears conditioned by a culture of individualism. That is the spirit of this season of Creation. It is so built into our American way of thinking, that it usually requires individuals to make a concerted mental effort to think of themselves as parts of a whole that is greater than the sum of individuals. This is sadly even true in our American Christian congregations. To drive this point home, answer this question please:

How have you been doing at *submitting to one another in fear of Christ?*⁶

Those words, translated from five Greek words, do not comprise a complete

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

sentence – hence the repeated references to them as the phrase for this Sunday, this week. That phrase implies that you as individuals, when you think of yourselves as Christians, think first of yourself as congregation in worship attached to Christ Jesus. If you have not been doing well at *submitting to one another in fear of Christ*, confess your sins to one another, and to God, believe in the Holy Absolution He gives.⁷ As you believe, so shall it be done for you!

Having received God’s forgiveness once again, now turn to the words that come just before our theme phrase. From them, we ask of the Spirit, what led You, dear God, to use such words to describe how we voluntarily submit to one another in Your Church?

Hear the long sentence:

*Then you may not become drunk with wine, in which remains excess, but all of you may be filled in spirit: speaking to one another in Psalms; and hymns; and spiritual odes - singing and playing on strings with your hearts to the Lord - giving thanks always concerning all things in (the) Name of our Lord Jesus Christ to the God and Father.*⁸

Those words about the Christian congregation gathered in worship were begun with a connecting word, “then.” That informs we hearers that the words which follow are a result of something that comes immediately before. That is,

*On account of this all of you may not become without understanding, but with understanding (know) what the will of the Lord (is).*⁹

That sentence begins with the phrase that may be translated, *therefore*. That informs us hearers that there is a statement before which leads us to this point. Therefore, we hear the first two verses of this week’s section of Ephesians:

⁷ Ibid.

*All of you must look then, carefully, how all of you conduct your lives, not as unwise men, but as wise men, redeeming the season, because the days remain evil.*¹⁰

You have heard the Apostolic introductory command for the Christian congregation. This command can only be obeyed by those assemblies that remain united to Christ Jesus through the means He chose. The Holy Spirit is calling you to walk about in this life as wise people. His work gives all of you the ability to live as ones who are wise in the Word of forgiveness, life and salvation, while you suffer through the evil in this time.

God's Word also implies that you may choose to conduct your lives as foolish ones. Of all the billions of people in this world today, only Christians are free to choose to be wise or unwise. That is because, while the wisdom of humanity may be great at times, in the sight of God it is displayed as foolishness.

Only those born of the Spirit are able to live as wise men before God. That is because the Spirit of God, who dwells in us through the Water and the Word, gives us God's wisdom. That is first, and foremost, the divine wisdom that decided in Himself, before the first day of Creation, to send the Second Person of God into human flesh to redeem us from the wages of sin. That is eternal death and its outer darkness separation from the Source of Light and life. (For those who were waiting, there is a tie to the Gospel for the week! For those who weren't, it is still a tie)! The Epistle begins with this connection:

*All of you must look then, carefully, how all of you conduct your lives, not as unwise men, but as wise men, redeeming the season, because the days remain evil.*¹¹

⁸ *Ephesians* 5:18-20.

⁹ *Ephesians* 5:17.

¹⁰ *Ephesians* 5:15-16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

These words, written to and for Christian congregations, call us to remember that God has awakened us from the darkness of death and brought us into the light of life. He has taken those who were once naked before Him in our sins, and clothed us with the white garments of His sinlessness. We who have been clothed with Christ's blood-washed robes are free to walk about in mortal life as wise ones who purchase at market, with Christ's blood, all God's good things.

That is, we take the currency of forgiveness He gives us, and use it to honor God by serving our neighbor. That Second Table of the Law work, is first done to our fellow members of the Body of Christ in this place. (That is not new. Dr. Luther often railed against the lack of Christian care for the workers of the Church while people concerned themselves with working for their own material gains)! Having submitted to one another in service, we take these blood-bought gifts into our world – to our Christian neighbors, and to those who are still dead in trespasses and sins.

Hear this clearly, the Word, the Spirit is not calling us to curve in on ourselves only. Rather, we are to work outward from our care of one another into care for others. To rephrase and strengthen a cliché, charity begins at home and flows outward from there.

That is *redeeming the time*. Because the days of this world are numbered, for they remain evil, we are called as a community to care first for our immediate members, and then to care for those outside. This is “both/and” care, concern, prayers, social welfare support and consolation. It is worked in us and through us by our Head, Christ Jesus.

Then, keeping before our mind the reality that these passing days are evil, the Apostle continues His admonition and encouragement to the congregation:

On account of this all of you may not become without understanding, but with understanding (know) what the will of the Lord (is).¹²

Because the days are evil, because we are working to redeem the long time before the Lord Jesus returns in power and glory, the congregation is called to intimate understanding of the will of the Lord. From this text, that is to sacrificially love one another, and then to love those in the world. Only those who have been bought by the precious blood of our Savior, Jesus, have been given this deep knowledge of God's will. That is, we who are saved, who continue to ensure that everyone in our number has adequate support for this life, we take life support to the Christians outside our walls, and then to those who have nothing of God. The congregation, while caring for her own, is called to reach out to those who need eternal life support and thus fulfill the will of God. To keep the congregation focused on this revealed will of the Father, the Apostle continues with words you've heard before:

Then you may not become drunk with wine, in which remains excess, but all of you may be filled in spirit: speaking to one another in Psalms; and hymns; and spiritual odes - singing and playing on strings with your hearts to the Lord - giving thanks always concerning all things in (the) Name of our Lord Jesus Christ to the God and Father.¹³

By remaining focused on the will of God for our salvation, and for that of all people, we are called away from those things that draw us away from confronting the evil in this time. He uses a specific example - the excess consumption of wine that was found in

¹² Ephesians 5:17.

pagan religious rituals – to draw the faithful into a deeper understanding of the Christian congregation at worship. Here as in at least two other New Testament letters (¹⁴) the jewels of Christian worship are recalled with the words *be filled in spirit: speaking to one another in Psalms; and hymns; and spiritual odes*, that is the Word of God and the treasures written by people out of it that remain faithful to it. ¹⁵

It is the Christian congregation, assembled by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Word, which is described in worship. The Church's focus is our voices lifted in song to give thanks to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. It is not all praise, but all thanks that is recorded. Look again at the words we sing in liturgy and hymn, test them against this biblical standard. See that those treasures that are faithful are the ones that find the congregation *giving thanks always concerning all things in (the) Name of our Lord Jesus Christ to the God and Father, submitting to one another in fear of Christ...*¹⁶ To summarize and conclude: the Church at Worship is the Epistle's illustration of the congregation's members *submitting to one another in fear of Christ...*

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Trinity XX (LSB One-year series)

Isaiah 55:1-9; Ephesians 5:15-21; Matthew 22:1-14

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Pastor Michael H. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

¹³ *Ephesians* 5:19.

¹⁴ *Col.* 3:16; *I Cor.* 4:15.

¹⁵ *Ephesians* 5:18-20.

¹⁶ *Ephesians* 5:20-21.

Translation, second draft:

All of you must look then, carefully, how all of you walk about, not as unwise ones, but as wise ones, buying up at marketplace the season because the days evil remain.

On account of this all of you might not become without understanding, but with understanding what (is) the will of the Lord.

Then you all might not become drunk by wine, in which remains excesses, but all of you might be filled in spirit: speaking to one another in Psalms (the plucking of strings); and hymns (sacred poetic compositions); and spiritual odes (lyric poetry), singing and playing on strings with the hearts of all of you to the Lord, giving thanks always concerning all things in Name of the Lord of us, Jesus Christ, to the God and Father.

Submitting to one another in fear of Christ...

Βλέπετε οὖν ἀκριβῶς πῶς περιπατεῖτε μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι ἀλλ' ὡς σοφοὶ ἔξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν **διὰ τοῦτο** μὴ γίνεσθε ἄφρονες ἀλλὰ συνίετε τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου **καὶ μὴ** μεθύσκεσθε οἴνῳ ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν ἀσωτία ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς [ἐν] ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς ᾄδοντες **καὶ** ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ ¹⁷

NOTES:

BOOK OF CONCORD:

623.42 ON 5:18

¹⁷Aland, B., Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. 1993, c1979. *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.) . United Bible Societies: Federal Republic of Germany

In the same way many "receive the Word with joy," but after that "they fall away again" (Luke 8:13). But the reason for this is not that God does not want to impart the grace of perseverance to those in whom he has "begun the good work." This would contradict St. Paul in Phil. 1:6. The reason is that they willfully turn away from the holy commandment, grieve and embitter the Holy Spirit, become entangled again in the filth of the world, and decorate their hearts as a tabernacle for the devil so that their last state will be worse than the first (2 Pet. 2:10; Luke 11:24, 25; Heb. 10:26; Eph. 5:3-11, 18).¹⁸

LUTHER'S WORKS:

5:21 Since a true Christian lives and labors on earth not for himself alone but for his neighbor, he does by the very nature of his spirit even what he himself has no need of, but is needful and useful to his neighbor. Because the sword is most beneficial and necessary for the whole world in order to preserve peace, punish sin, and restrain the wicked, the Christian submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays his taxes, honors those in authority,³⁸ serves, helps, and does all he can to assist the governing authority, that it may continue to function and be held in honor and fear. Although he has no need of these things for himself—to him they are not essential—nevertheless, he concerns himself about what is serviceable and of benefit to others, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 5[:21-6:9].¹⁹

5:12 Perhaps the chaste hearts and holy priests of God who take no pleasure in anything but what they themselves say or write, will open their mouths at this and say. What a burden the cowl is for that monk! All he wants is a woman! Let them heap their slander and mischief upon me, those chaste hearts and great saints. Let them keep their hearts of iron and stone, let them puff themselves up, as long as you do not deny that you are human, a person of flesh and blood. For the rest let God judge between these angelic, staunch heroes and you, a sick and despised sinner! I should like to think that I have reached a point in life where by the grace of God I will remain as I am, although I am not yet over the hill and dare not compare myself with those chaste hearts. Indeed it would be a pity if I did, and I pray that God in his mercy may save me from that. For if you knew them as they really are, those men who pretend such great chastity and make such a public show of their self-discipline—and what it is that St. Paul means when he says in Ephesians 5[:12]: "For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret,"—then you would consider that their highly praised celibacy was not even worth a prostitute wiping her shoes on it. Everything is topsy-turvy, that the chaste are the unchaste, and appearances deceive. Dear boy, do not be at all ashamed that you desire a girl, or that a girl longs for a boy, but see to it that it leads to marriage, and not fornication. Then there is nothing disgraceful about it—as little as eating and drinking is a disgrace.³¹ Celibacy is supposed to be a virtue, but it is

¹⁸Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

¹⁹Luther, M. 1999, c1962. *Vol. 45: Luther's works, vol. 45 : The Christian in Society II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

³¹Luther's views on marriage and celibacy at this time are also presented in *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), LW 45, 17-49.

a veritable miracle of God, just as if a person did not eat or drink. It is beyond the capacity of a healthy body, not to mention the incapability of sinful and depraved human nature. There are not many virgins to whom God granted a long life; rather hurriedly he whisked them out of this world, like Cecilia, Agnes, Lucia, Agatha, and others like them. I know full well how noble that treasure is, but also how difficult it is to preserve for any length of time. If in every town, there were five boys and five girls, all twenty years of age, completely pure, with no experience of natural discharge, then I would be right in saying that the state of Christianity was better than in the days of the apostles and martyrs. O Lord God, I believe that unchastity would not have become so prevalent and spread in such a terrible way, if it had not been for this rule and vow of chastity. What a Sodom and Gomorrah the devil has created through these rules and vows! How vulgar has he made this odd chastity, causing unspeakable anguish. No brothel stimulant is as dangerous as these rules and vows invented by the devil.²⁰

²⁰Luther, M. 1999, c1974. *Vol. 52: Luther's works, vol. 52 : Sermons II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia