

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY & NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

EPHESIANS 4:1-6 & EPHESIANS 4:22-28.

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.

THE CHRISTIAN CALLING AND UNITY

1. This, too, is a beautiful sermon, delivered by Paul to the Ephesians, concerning the good works of Christians, who believe and are obedient to the doctrine of the Gospel. In the knowledge of good works Paul desires Christians to grow and increase, as we learned in the epistle for last Sunday. The ground of all doctrine, of all right living, the supreme and eternal treasure of him who is a Christian in the sight of God, is faith in Christ. It alone secures forgiveness of sins and makes us children of God. Now, where this faith is, fruits should follow as evidence that Christians in their lives honor and obey God. They are necessary for God's glory and for the Christian's own honor and eternal reward before him.

2. Paul, remembering the imprisonment and tribulations he suffered because of the Gospel and for the advantage, as he before said, of the Ephesians, gives the admonition here. He would have them, in return for his sufferings, honor the Gospel in their lives. First he names a general rule of life for Christians.

THE CHRISTIAN CALLING

“To walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called.”

3. The chief thing that should influence a Christian’s outward walk is the remembrance of his calling and appointment by God. He should be mindful of why he is called a Christian, and live consistently. He must shine before the world; that is, through his life and God’s work, the Word and the name of Christ the Lord must be exalted. Christ exhorts his disciples: *“Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”* Matthew 5:16.

4. Similarly, Paul would say: *“You have received God’s grace and his Word and are a blessed people. In Christ all your needs are blessedly supplied. Be mindful of this and remember you are called to a far different and vastly higher life than others know. Show by your manner of living that you seek a higher good than the world seeks – indeed, that you have received far greater blessings. Let your lives honor and glorify the Lord who has given you such blessings. Give no occasion for dishonoring your treasured faith, or for scorning his Word. Rather, influence men by your godly walk and good works to believe in Christ and to glorify him.”*

5. Let the Christian know his earthly life is not unto himself, nor for his own sake; his life and work here belong to Christ, his Lord. Hence must his walk be such as shall contribute to the honor and glory of his Master, whom he should so serve that he may be able to say with Paul, not only with respect to the spiritual life – the life of faith and of righteousness by grace – but also with respect to its fruits – the outward conduct: *“It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.”* Galatians 2:20. The Christian’s manner of life may be styled *“walking in Christ”*; yes, as Paul elsewhere has it (Romans 13:14), *“putting on”* the Lord Jesus Christ, like a garment or an ornament. The world is to recognize Christ by his shining in us.

6. But the so-called Christian life that does not honor Christ makes its sin the more heinous for the name it bears. Every sin the people of God commit is a provocation of Jehovah; not only in the act of disobedience itself, but also in the transgression of the second commandment. The enormity of the sin is magnified by the conditions that make it a blasphemy of God’s name and an occasion of offense to others. Paul says in Romans 2:24: *“For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”* So a Christian should, in his life, by all means guard the honor of God – of Christ. He must take heed that he be not guilty of blaspheming that name and of doing wickedness. The devil, aided by the world, construes every act, when possible, to reflect upon God’s honor and glory. His purpose is to manifest his bitter hatred against Christ and the Word; also to injure the Church by charging offenses, thus deterring unbelievers from embracing the Gospel and causing the weak to fall away.

7. To guard against such disaster, Christians should be particularly careful to give, in their conduct, no occasion for offense, and to value the name and honor of their God too highly

to permit blasphemy of them. They should prefer to lose their own honor, their wealth, their physical wellbeing, even their lives, rather than that these, their most precious possessions and greatest blessings, should suffer disgrace. Let them remember that upon keeping sacred the name and honor of God depends their own standing before God and men. God promises (1 Samuel 2:30), “*Them that honor me! will honor.*” But pursuing the opposite course, Christians bring upon themselves God’s sternest wrath and effect their own rejection and shame. For he says further: “They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” And in the second commandment God threatens certain and terrible punishment to abusers of his name; that is, to them who do not employ it to his honor and praise.

8. Well may every Christian examine his own life to see if he is careful to guard against offense to the Gospel and to regulate his words and conduct by God’s first commandment, making them contribute to the honor and praise of the divine name and the holy Gospel. Weighty indeed and well calculated to cause complaint are the sins to which every Christian is liable in this respect; well may he avoid them lest he heap to himself the wrath of God. Especially need we be careful in these last and evil times when the Gospel is everywhere suppressed by great offenses. Man was created to be the image of God, that through this his image God might himself be expressed. God’s image, then, should be reflected in the lives of men as a likeness in a glass, and a Christian can have no higher concern than to live without dishonor to the name of God.

ADMONITION TO SPECIAL CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

9. Such is the first part of Paul’s admonition concerning the general life of Christians. He goes on to make special mention of several good works which Christians should diligently observe: humility, meekness, longsuffering, preservation of the unity of the Spirit, and so on. These have been specially treated before, in other epistle lessons, particularly those from Peter. Humility, for instance – mentioned in today’s lesson – is taken up the third Sunday after Trinity; patience and meekness, the second Sunday after Easter, and the fifth Sunday after Trinity.

10. The text here presents good works sufficient to occupy all Christians in every station of life; we need not seek other nor better ones. Paul would not impose upon Christians peculiar works, something unrelated to the ordinary walks of life, as certain false saints taught and practiced. These teachers commanded separation from society, isolation in the wilderness, the establishment of monasteries and the performance of self-appointed works. Such works they exalted as superior to ordinary Christian virtues. Indeed, their practice amounted to rejection of the latter, and they actually regarded them as dangerous. The Papacy has in the past shamelessly styled the observance of Christian good works as worldly living, and men were compelled to believe they would find it hard to reach heaven unless they became ecclesiasts – for they regarded only the monks and priests worthy – or at least made themselves partakers of the works of ecclesiasts by purchasing their merits. But Paul – in fact, the entire Scriptures – teaches no other good works than God enjoins

upon all men in the Ten Commandments, and which pertain to the common conditions of life. True, these make not such brilliant show in the eyes of the world as do the self-appointed ceremonials constituting the divine service of hypocrites; nevertheless, they are true, worthy, good and profitable works in the sight of God and man. What can be more acceptable to God and advantageous to man than a life lived, in its own calling, in the way that contributes to the honor of God, and that by its example influences others to love God's Word and to praise his name? Moreover, what virtues, of all man possesses, serve him better than humility, meekness, patience and harmony of mind?

11. Now, where is a better opportunity for the exercise of these virtues than amidst the conditions in which God destined us to live – in society, where we mingle with one another? Upon these conditions, self-appointed, unusual lives and monastic holiness have no bearing. For what other person is profited by your entering a cloister, making yourself peculiar, refusing to live as your fellows do? Who is benefited by your cowl, your austere countenance, your hard bed? Who comes to know God or to have a peaceful conscience by such practices on your part, or who is thereby influenced to love his neighbor? Indeed, how can you serve your neighbor by such a life? How manifest your love, humility, patience and meekness if you are unwilling to live among men? if you so strenuously adhere to your self-appointed orders as to allow your neighbor to suffer want before you would dishonor your rules?

12. Astonishing fact, that the world is merged in darkness so great it utterly disregards the Word of God and the conditions he designed for our daily living. If we preach to the world faith in God's Word, the world receives it as heresy. If we speak of works instituted of God himself and conditions of his own appointing, the world regards it as idle talk; it knows better. To live a simple Christian life in one's own family, to faithfully perform the duties of a man-servant or maid-servant – "Oh, that," it says, "is merely the following of worldly pursuits. To do good works you must set about it in a different way. You must creep into a corner, don a cap, make pilgrimages to some saint; then you may be able to help yourself and others to gain heaven." If the question be asked, "Why do so? where has God commanded it?" there is, according to their theory, really no answer to make but this: Our Lord God knows nothing about the matter; he does not understand what good works are. How can he teach us? He must himself be tutored by these remarkably enlightened saints.

FRUITS OF ORIGINAL SIN

13. But all this error results from that miserable inherent plague, that evil termed "*original sin*." It is a blind wickedness, refusing to recognize the Word of God and his will and work, but introducing instead things of its own heathenish imagination. It draws such a thick covering over eyes, ears and hearts that it renders men unable to perceive how the simple life of a Christian, of husband or wife, of the lower or the higher walks of life, can be beautified by honoring the Word of God. Original sin will not be persuaded to the faithful performance of the works that God testifies are well pleasing to him when wrought by believers in Christ. In a word, universal experience proves that to perform really good

works is a special and remarkable grace to which few attain; while the great mass of souls aspiring after holiness vainly busy themselves with worthless works, being deceived into thinking them great, and thus make themselves, as Paul says, “*unto every good work reprobate.*” Titus 1:16. This fruitless effort is one evil result of the error of human ideas of holiness and the practice of self-chosen works.

14. Another error is the hindrance – yes, the suppression and destruction – of the beautiful virtues of humility, meekness, patience and spiritual harmony here commended of Paul. At the same time the devil is given occasion to encourage fiendish blasphemy. In every instance where the Word of God is set aside for humanly-appointed works, differing views and theories must obtain. One introduces this and another that, each striving for first recognition; then a third endeavors to improve upon their doctrine. Consequently divisions and factions ensue as numerous as the teachers and their creeds; as exemplified in the countless sects to this time prevalent in Popedom, and in the factious spirits of all time. Under such circumstances, none of the virtues like humility, meekness, patience, love, can have place. Opposite conditions must prevail, since harmony of hearts and minds is lacking. One teacher haughtily rejects another, and if his own opinions fail to receive recognition and approval, he displays anger, envy and hatred. He will neither affiliate with nor tolerate him whose practices accord not with his own.

15. On the other hand, the Christian life, the life of faith with its fruits, controlled as it is by the Word of God, is in every way conducive to the preservation of love and harmony, and to the promotion of all virtues. It interferes not with the God-ordained relations of life and their attendant obligations upon men – the requirements of social order, the duties of father and mother, of son and daughter, master and mistress, servant and maid. All life’s relations are confirmed by it as valid and its duties as vital. The Christian faith bids each person in his life, and all in common, to be diligent in the works of love, humility, patience. It teaches that one be not intolerant of another, but rather render him his due, remembering that he whose condition in life is the most insignificant can be equally upright and blessed before God with the occupant of the most significant position. Again, it teaches that man must have patience with the weakness of his fellow, being mindful of how others must bear with his own imperfections. In short, it says one must manifest to another the love and kindness he would have that other extend to him.

16. To this Christian attainment, contributes very largely the single fact that a Christian is conscious he has, through Christ, the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And these not for his own merits or peculiar life and works, but because he is, no matter how insignificant in condition before the world, a child of God and blessed; a partaker, if he but believes, in all the blessings of Christ, sharing equally with the most eminent saint. So, then, he need not look about for works not enjoined upon him. He need not covet those wrought in prominence and by the aid of great gifts of God – of unusual attainments. Let him confine himself to his own sphere; let him serve God in his vocation, remembering that God makes him, too, his instrument in his own place. Again, the occupant of a higher sphere, the possessor of higher gifts and accomplishments, who likewise serves in his

vocation received from God, should learn and exhibit harmony of mind. So shall he continue humble and be tolerant of others. He should remember that he is not worthier in the eyes of God because of his greater gifts, but rather is under deeper obligation to serve his fellows, and that God can use the possessor of lesser gifts for even greater accomplishments than himself can boast. Having so learned, he will be able to manifest patience, meekness and love toward his weak and imperfect neighbors, considering them members of Christ with him, and partakers of the same grace and salvation.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

17. Now you have the reason why the apostles Paul and Peter everywhere so faithfully enforce this virtue, the unity of the Spirit. It is the most necessary and beautiful grace that Christians possess. It holds together the Christian community, preventing factions and schisms, as before explained. So Paul here admonishes men to be careful for harmony, making every endeavor to preserve it. The term “unity of the Spirit” is used to make plain the apostle’s meaning. He would thus emphasize oneness of doctrine – the one true faith. Since the Holy Spirit is present only where there is knowledge of and faith in the Gospel of Christ, “unity of the Spirit” implies a unity of faith. Above all things, then, the effort must be to preserve, in the Church, the doctrine of the Scriptures, pure and in its unity.

18. One of the wickedest offenses possible to commit against the Church is the stirring up of doctrinal discord and division, a thing the devil encourages to the utmost. This sin usually has its rise with certain haughty, conceited, self-seeking leaders who desire peculiar distinction for themselves and strive for personal honor and glory. They harmonize with none and would think themselves disgraced were they not honored as superior and more learned individuals than their fellows, a distinction they do not merit. They will give honor to no one, even when they have to recognize the superiority of his gifts over their own. In their envy, anger, hatred and vengefulness, they seek occasion to create factions and to draw people to themselves. Therefore Paul exhorts first to the necessary virtue of love, having which men will be enabled to exercise humility, patience and forbearance toward one another.

19. The character of the evils resulting to the Church from divisions and discords in doctrine is evident from the facts. Many are deceived; the masses immediately respond to new doctrine brilliantly presented in specious words by presumptuous individuals thirsting for fame. More than that, many weak but well-meaning ones fall to doubting, uncertain where to stand or with whom to hold. Consequently men reject and blaspheme the Christian doctrine and seek occasion to dispute it. Many become reckless pleasure-lovers, disregarding all religion and ignoring the Word of God. Further, even they who are called Christians come to have hard feelings against one another, and, figuratively, bite and devour in their hate and envy. Consequently their love grows cold and faith is extinguished.

20. Of so much disturbance in the Church, and of the resulting injuries to souls, are guilty those conceited, factious leaders who do not adhere to the true doctrine, preserving the unity of the Spirit, but seek to institute something new for the sake of advancing their own ideas and their own honor, or gratifying their revenge. They thus bring upon themselves damnation infinitely more intolerable than others suffer. Christians, then, should be careful to give no occasion for division or discord, but to be diligent, as Paul here admonishes, to preserve unity. And this is not an easy thing to do, for among Christians occasions frequently arise provoking selfwill, anger and hatred. The devil is always at hand to stir and blow the flame of discord. Let Christians take heed they do not give place to the promptings of the devil and of the flesh. They must strive against them, submitting to all suffering, and performing all demands, whether honor, property, physical welfare or life itself be involved, in the effort to prevent, so far as in them lies, any disturbance of the unity of doctrine, of faith and of Spirit. *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.”*

21. Christians should feel bound to maintain the unity of the Spirit, since they are all members of one body and partakers of the same spiritual blessings. They have the same priceless treasures – one God and Father in heaven, one Lord and Savior, one Word, baptism and faith; in short, one and the same salvation, a blessing common to all whereof one has as much as another, and cannot obtain more. What occasion, then, for divisions or for further seeking?

22. Here Paul teaches what the true Christian Church is and how it may be identified. There is not more than one Church, or people of God, one earth. This one Church has one faith, one baptism, one confession of God the Father and of Jesus Christ. Its members faithfully hold, and abide by, these common truths. Every one desiring to be saved and to come to God must be incorporated into this Church, outside of which no one will be saved.

23. Unity of the Church does not consist in similarity of outward form of government, likeness of Law, tradition and ecclesiastical customs, as the Pope and his followers claim. They would exclude from the Church all not obedient to them in these outward things, though members of the one faith, one baptism, and so on. The Church is termed “one holy, catholic or Christian Church,” because it represents one plain, pure Gospel doctrine, and an outward confession thereof, always and everywhere, regardless of dissimilarity of physical life, or of outward ordinances, customs and ceremonies.

24. But they are not members of the true Church of Christ who, instead of preserving unity of doctrine and oneness of Christian faith, cause divisions and offenses – as Paul says (Romans 16:17) – by the human doctrines and self-appointed works for which they contend, imposing them upon all Christians as necessary. They are perverters and destroyers of the Church, as we have elsewhere frequently shown. The consolation of the true doctrine is ours, and we hold it in opposition to Popedom, which accuses us of having withdrawn from them, and so condemns us as apostates from the Church. They are, however,

themselves the real apostates, persecuting the truth and destroying the unity of the Spirit under the name and title of the Church and of Christ. Therefore, according to the command of God, all men are under obligation to shun them and withdraw from them.

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NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

EPHESIANS 4:22-28.

Ephesians 4:22-28.

That ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need.

DUTY TO NEW AND OLD MAN

1. Here again is an admonition for Christians to follow up their faith by good works and a new life, for though they have forgiveness of sins through baptism, the old Adam still adheres to their flesh and makes himself felt in tendencies and desires to vices physical and mental. The result is that unless Christians offer resistance, they will lose their faith and the remission of sins and will in the end be worse than they were at first; for they will begin to despise and persecute the Word of God when corrected by it. Yea, even those who gladly hear the Word of God, who highly prize it and aim to follow it, have daily need of

admonition and encouragement, so strong and tough is that old hide of our sinful flesh. And so powerful and wily is our old evil foe that wherever he can gain enough of an opening to insert one of his claws, he thrusts in his whole self and will not desist until he has again sunk man into his former condemnable unbelief and his old way of despising and disobeying God.

2. Therefore, the Gospel ministry is necessary in the Church, not only for instruction of the ignorant – such as the simple, unlettered people and the children – but also for the purpose of awakening those who know very well what they are to believe and how they are to live, and admonishing them to be on their guard daily and not to become indolent, disheartened or tired in the war they must wage on this earth with the devil, with their own flesh and with all manner of evil.

3. For this reason Paul is so persistent in his admonitions that he actually seems to be overdoing it. He proceeds as if the Christians were either too dull to comprehend or so inattentive and forgetful that they must be reminded and driven. The apostle well knows that though they have made a beginning in faith and are in that state which should show the fruits of faith, such result is not so easily forthcoming. It will not do to think and say: Well, it is sufficient to have the doctrine, and if we have the Spirit and faith, then fruits and good works will follow of their own accord. For although the Spirit truly is present and, as Christ says, willing and effective in those that believe, on the other hand the flesh is weak and sluggish. Besides, the devil is not idle, but seeks to seduce our weak nature by temptations and allurements.

4. So we must not permit the people to go on in their way, neglecting to urge and admonish them, through God's Word, to lead a godly life. Indeed, you dare not be negligent and backward in this duty; for, as it is, our flesh is all too sluggish to heed the Spirit and all too able to resist it. Paul says (Galatians 5:17): "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ... that ye may not do the things that ye would." Therefore, God is constrained to do as a good and diligent householder or ruler, who, having a slothful manservant or maid-servant, or careless officers, who otherwise are neither wicked nor faithless, will not consider it sufficient once or twice to direct, but will constantly be supervising and directing.

5. Nor have we as yet arrived at the point where our flesh and blood will joyfully and gladly abound in good works and obedience to God as the spirit is inclined and faith directs. Even with the utmost efforts the Spirit scarce can compel our old man. What would be the result if we were no more urged and admonished but could go our way thinking, as many self-satisfied persons do: I am well acquainted with my duties, having learned them many years ago and having heard frequent explanations of them; yea, I have taught others? It might be that one year's intermission of preaching and admonition would place us below the level of the heathen.

6. Now, this exhortation in itself is simple and easy of comprehension. The apostle is but repeating his exhortations of other places – on the fruits of faith, or a godly walk – merely in different terms. Here he speaks of putting away the old man and putting on the new man, of being “renewed in the spirit of your mind.”

“THE OLD MAN”

7. What he calls “the old man” is well known to us; namely, the whole nature of man as descended from Adam after his fall in paradise, being blinded by the devil, depraved in soul, not keeping God before his eyes nor trusting him, yes, utterly regardless of God and the judgment day. Though with his mouth he may honor God’s Word and the Gospel, yet in reality he is unchanged; if he does have a little additional knowledge, he has just as little fear, love and trust in God as heretofore.

8. Such a life and such conduct should not be found among you, says the apostle; you are not to continue with “the old man.” He must be put off and laid aside. Your former manner of life, inherited of Adam, consisted in disobeying God, in neither fearing, trusting nor calling upon him. Again, in your body you obeyed not God’s commandments, being given to lust, pride, insatiable greed, envy, hatred, etc. A life and walk of this nature is not becoming a Christian who is regarded as, and truly is, a different order of being from his former self, as we shall hear. Necessarily he should walk differently.

9. In this respect a Christian must take heed that he does not deceive himself; the true Christian differs from the hypocrite. True Christians so live that it is apparent from their lives that they keep God before their eyes and truly believe the Gospel, while hypocrites likewise show by their walk that their pretensions of faith and forgiveness of sin are hollow. No proof is seen in their lives and works showing that they have in any wise mended their former ways; they merely deck themselves with a pretense, with the name of Gospel, of faith, of Christ.

10. Now, the apostle has two things to say of the old man: that he corrupts himself in error as to the soul and in lusts as to the body. Paul portrays the old man – meaning every man without true faith though he bear the name of a Christian – as in the first place given to error: coming short of the truth, knowing naught of the true knowledge of Christ and faith in him, indifferent alike to God’s wrath and God’s grace, deceiving himself with his own conceit that darkness is light. The old man believes that God will not be moved to vengeance though he do as he pleases, even to decorating vices with the names of virtues. Haughtiness, greed, oppressing and tormenting the poor, wrath, envy – all this he would call preserving his dignity, exercising strict discipline, honestly and economically conducting his domestic affairs, caring for his wife and children, displaying Christian zeal and love of justice, etc. In short, he proceeds in the perfectly empty delusion and self-conceit that he is a Christian.

11. Out of this error proceeds the other corruption, the lusts of the body, which are fruits of unbelief. Unbelief causes men to walk in sinful security and yield to all the appetites of their flesh. Such have no inclination toward what is good, nor do they aim to promote

orderliness, honor or virtue. They take desperate chances on their lives, wanting to live according to the lusts of their flesh, and yet not be reprimanded.

12. This, says the apostle, is the old man's course and nature. He will do naught but ruin himself. The longer continued, the greater his debasement. He draws down upon himself his own condemnation and penalty for body and soul; for in proportion as he becomes unbelieving and hardhearted, does he become haughty, hateful and faithless, and eventually a perfect scoundrel and villain. This was your former manner of life, when as yet you were heathen and non-Christians. Therefore you must by all means put off the old man and cast him far from you; otherwise you cannot remain a Christian. For glorying in the grace of God and the forgiveness of sin is inconsistent with following sin – remaining in the former old un-Christian life and walking in error and deceitful lusts.

THE GROWTH OF “THE NEW MAN”

“And that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

13. Having put away the old man, the apostle exhorts us further to put on the new man, that day by day we may grow as new creatures. This is effected by first being delivered from error – from the erroneous thoughts and ideas incident to our corrupt nature with its false conceptions of God, wherein we do not fear nor believe him – and then from God's Word receiving the right understanding of him. When we rightly understand, we shall fear his wrath against sin and rely on his grace in true faith, believing that he will forgive our sins for Christ's sake and will hear our prayer for strength and assistance to withstand and conquer, and to continually grow in faith.

14. This change Paul calls being “renewed in the spirit of your mind”; that is, constantly growing and becoming established in that true conception and clear knowledge of Christ begun in us, in opposition to error and idle vaporings. He who is thus received, says the apostle, is a man “that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.” In the old man there is naught but error, by means of which the devil leads to destruction. But the new man has the Spirit and the truth, by which the heart is illumined unto righteousness and holiness, wherein man follows the guidance of God's Word and feels a desire for a godly walk and good life; just as, on the other hand, the desire and love for sin and wickedness is the product of error. This new man is created after God, as an image of God, and must of necessity differ from such as live in error and in lusts, without the knowledge of God and disobedient to him. For if God's image is in man, man must consequently have the right knowledge of God and right conceptions and ideas, and lead a godly life consistent with holiness and righteousness as found in God himself.

15. Such an image of God Adam was when first created. He was, as to the soul, truthful, free from error, and possessed of true faith and knowledge of God; and as to the body, holy and pure, that is, without the impure, unclean desires of avarice, lasciviousness, envy,

hatred, etc. And all his children – all men – would have so remained from their birth if he had not suffered himself to be led astray by the devil and to be thus ruined. But since Christians, by the grace and Spirit of God, now have been renewed to this image of God, they are so to live that soul and spirit are righteous and pleasing to God through faith in Christ; and that also the body – meaning the whole external life – be pure and holy, which is genuine holiness.

16. Some there are who pretend to great holiness and purity, but it is mere pretense, deceiving the people in general. Such are the factious spirits and monastic saints, who base their holiness and uprightness solely on an external, peculiar life and on self-elected works. Theirs may be apparently a commendable, holy and pure way of praying and fasting, of denying self, etc., and the people may call it so; but inwardly they are and remain haughty, venomous, hateful, filled with the filth of human lust and evil thoughts, as Christ says of such. Matthew 15:19; Luke 16:15. Likewise their righteousness on which they pride themselves before God has a certain gloss, on the strength of which they presume to merit the grace of God for themselves and others; but inwardly they have no true conception of God, being in rank unbelief, that is, false and vain suppositions, or doubts. Such righteousness, or holiness, is not true nor honest. It is made up wholly of hypocrisy and deceit. It is built, not of God nor after God, but after that lying spirit, the devil.

17. The true Christian, Paul asserts, has been molded through faith in Christ into a new man, like unto God, truly justified and holy in his sight; even as Adam originally was in perfect harmony of heart with God, showing true, straightforward confidence, love and willingness. And his body was holy and pure, knowing naught of evil, impure or improper desire. Thus the whole life of the man was a beautiful portrait of God, a mirror wherein God himself was reflected; even as the lives and natures of the holy spirits the angels are wrapped up in God and represent true knowledge of him, assurance, and joy in him and utterly pure and holy thoughts and works according to the will of God.

18. But since man is now so grievously fallen from this cheerful confidence, this certainty and joy, into doubts or into presumption toward God, and from unspotted, noble obedience into the lusts of iniquity and ungodliness, it follows that not from mankind can come help or relief. Nor can any one hope for remedy except the Christians, who through faith in Christ begin again to have a joyful and confident heart toward God. They thus enter again into their former relation and into the true paradise of perfect harmony with God and of justification; they are comforted by his grace. Accordingly they are disposed to lead a godly life in harmony with God's commandments and to resist ungodly lusts and ways. These begin to taste God's goodness and loving kindness, as Paul says, and realize what they lost in paradise. He, therefore, that would be a Christian should strive to be found in this new man created after God; not in blind error and vain conceit, but in the very essence of righteousness and holiness before God.

TWO CLASSES OF SINS

“Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.”

19. Lest there might be one who failed to understand the meaning of the old and the new man, or of true and false righteousness and holiness, the apostle now proceeds to give an example or two, making it easier for us to grasp the idea. All sin comes under one of two classes: First, that of the devil’s own making, such as murder and deceit; for by lies he establishes all idolatry, error, false faith and holiness, and among men he creates faithlessness, deceit, malice, etc. Secondly, those sins which he instigates man to commit against man; deeds of wrath, hatred, vengeance and murder. Paul combines these two classes.

20. Now, when a man does not deal fairly with his neighbor, but practices dishonesty and deceit, be it in matters spiritual or temporal (and the world is ever deceitful in all transactions), then certainly the old man holds sway and not righteousness nor holiness, however much the man may effect a good appearance and evade the courts. For such conduct does not reflect God’s image, but the devil’s. For the heart does not rely on God and his truth, otherwise it would war with fraud and deception; but its object is to clothe itself with a misleading garb, even assuming the name of God, and thus to deceive, belie, betray and forsake its neighbor at the bidding of every fiendish whim, and all for the satisfaction of its avarice, selfishness and pride.

21. In contrast thereto you can recognize the new man. He speaks the truth and hates lies, not only those momentous lies against the first table of the Ten Commandments, but also those against the second table; for he deals faithfully and in a brotherly way with others, doing as he would be done by himself. Thus should Christians live with each other, as members of one body, according to the apostle, and as having in Christ all things common and alike.

“Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”

22. Half the sins which the world has learned of its lord and master, the devil, consist in lying and deceiving, and that in the name and appearance of truth. No one wants to be called a liar, and even the devil covers his lies with the name of truth. The other half, which is easier to recognize, consists in wrath and its fruits. And this class is usually the result of the other. The world, for its own advantage, lies and deceives; and when it sees mankind acting in opposition to its wishes, or beholds its lies exposed and its schemes thwarted, it begins to rage in wrath against God, endeavoring to avenge itself and inflict harm, but fraudulently disguising its wicked motive under the plea of having good and abundant reasons for its action.

23. Therefore Paul admonishes the Christians as new creatures, to guard against this vice of wrath, adducing the fourth verse of the fourth Psalm: "Stand in awe and sin not." The repetition of this passage sounds, in Paul's rendering, as if permission to be angry were given; he says: "Be ye angry, and sin not." But Paul is taking into consideration the way of the world. Men are tempted and moved to anger. There are no clean records. Under sudden provocation the heart swells with ire, while the devil busily fans the flame; for he is ever alert to stamp upon us his seal and image and make us like unto him, either through error and false doctrine, or through wrath and murder in conflict with love and patience. These two forms of evil you will encounter, especially if you make an effort to be a godly Christian, to defend the truth and to live uprightly in the sight of all. You will meet with all manner of malice aforethought and deceit, and with faithlessness and malignity on the part of those you have benefited; again, with unmasked violence and injustice on the part of those who should protect you and see to your interests. This will hurt and move you to wrath. Yea, in your own house and among your dear Christian brethren you will often meet with that which vexes you; again, a word of yours may hurt their feelings. And it will not be otherwise. This life of ours is so constituted that such conditions must be. Flesh and blood cannot but be stirred at times by wrath and impatience, especially when it receives evil for good; and the devil is ever at hand kindling your anger and endeavoring to fan into a blaze the wrath and ill humor between yourself and your neighbor.

24. But right here, says the apostle, you should beware and not sin; not give rein, nor yield to the impulse and promptings of wrath. That you may indeed be moved, the apostle would say, I well know, and you may fancy to have the best of reasons for exhibiting anger and vengeance; but beware of doing what your wrath would have you do: and if overcome by wrath and led to rashness, do not continue in it, do not harbor it, but subdue and restrain it, the sooner the better; do not suffer it to take root or to remain with you over night.

25. If followed, wrath will not suffer you to do a single right thing, as James affirms (James 1:20). It causes man to fall and sin against God and his neighbor. Even the heathen have seen that wrath gets the better of reason and is never the source of good counsel. In line with this, we read that St. Ambrose reprov'd the emperor Theodosius for having, while in a rage, caused the execution of many persons in Thessalonica; and that he succeeded in having the emperor issue a rescript to the effect that no one should be executed, even on his imperial order and command, until a full month had passed by, thus affording an opportunity to rescind the order if given in haste and wrath.

26. Therefore the Psalm says: When wrath attacks and moves you, do not at once give it leave to do its will. Therein you would certainly commit sin. But go into your chamber, commune and take counsel with yourself, pray the Lord's Prayer, repeat some good passages from God's Word, curb yourself and confide in God; he will uphold your rights.

27. It is this the apostle has in mind when saying: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." A Christian must not entertain wrath; he should instantly quench and stifle it. It is the part of the new man to control anger, that the devil may not move him from his new-found faith and make him lose what he has received. If he yields to these instigations of his

flesh, he thereby returns to the error and condemnation in the old man and loses control of himself, following his own desires. Then he adorns a lie with the appearance of truth, claiming the right to be angry and take revenge; just as the world does when it asserts: This fellow has done me infinite violence and injustice; am I to suffer it? I have a just cause and shall not recline my head in ease until he is repaid! By such talk it loses its case before both God and men; as the saying goes: He that strikes back has the most unjust cause.

28. Both divine and human justice forbids that a man be judge in his own case. For this very reason God has established governmental and judicial authority, in his stead to punish transgressions, which – when properly administered – is not man’s but God’s judgment. He therefore that invades such judgment, invades the authority of God himself; he commits a double wrong and merits double condemnation. If you desire to seek and obtain redress in the courts, you are at liberty to do so, provided you proceed in the proper way, at the proper place and with those to whom God has entrusted authority. To these authorities you may appeal for redress. If you obtain it according to law, well and good; if not, you must suffer wrong and commit your case to God, as we have explained more fully elsewhere.

29. In short, we find in this unique passage a statement to the effect that he who curbs not his wrath but retains it longer than a day, or over night, cannot be a Christian. Where then do they stand who entertain wrath and hatred indefinitely, for one, two, three, seven, ten years? Such is no longer human wrath but fiendish wrath from hell; it will not be satisfied nor extinguished, but when it once takes possession of a man he would, if able, destroy everything in a moment with his hellish fire. Even so the arch-fiend is not satisfied with having cast the whole human race into sin and death, but will not rest content unless he can drag all human beings into eternal damnation.

30. A Christian therefore has ample cause to carefully guard against this vice. God may have patience with you when wrath wells up in your heart – although that, too, is sinful – but take heed that wrath does not overcome you and cause you to fall. Rather take serious counsel with yourself and extinguish and expel your anger by applying passages of Holy Writ and calling upon your faith. When alone or about to retire, repeat the Lord’s Prayer, ask for forgiveness and confess that God daily forgives you much oftener than your neighbor sins against you. *“Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need.”*

31. This thought is brought out also in the next Epistle, namely, that a Christian should guard against giving offense to anybody by his life, lest God’s name be blasphemed. It is a grand thing to be a Christian, who, as has been stated, is a new man created after God and a true image of God, wherein God himself desires to be reflected. Therefore, whatever of good a Christian does, or whatever of evil he does, under the name of a Christian, either honors or disgraces God’s name. Now, says Paul, whenever you follow your lusts, in obedience to your old Adam, you do naught but give occasion to the slanderers – the devil and his troop – to blaspheme the name of God. For the devil, even without your assistance,

at all times seeks opportunity – nor can he desist – to befoul our dear Gospel and the name of God with his slanderous tales, composed, if need be, entirely of lies. But where he finds the semblance of occasion he knows how to profit by it. He will then open his mouth wide and cry: Behold, these are your Gospel people! Here you have the fruits of this new doctrine! Is their Christ such a one as they honor by their lives?

32. So then a Christian should be exceedingly careful and cautious for this reason, if for no other: to protect the name and honor of his dear God and Savior and not to do the devil the favor of letting him whet his slanderous tongue on Christ's name. How shall we stand and answer in his sight when we cannot deny the fact that our life gives just cause for complaint and offense? By such a life we intentionally bring disgrace and shame upon God's name and Word, which things should be our highest treasures and most valuable possessions.

33. When the apostle says, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need," he indicates the true fruit of repentance, which consists in abandoning and utterly abstaining from evil and in doing good. He at the same time attacks and reproves the sin of theft so common in all walks of life. And them who idle away their time and neglect their duty of serving and helping their fellow-beings, he calls – and rightfully – thieves in God's sight.

34. For the right interpretation of the commandment, Thou shalt not steal, is this: Thou shalt live of thine own work, that thou mayest have to give to the needy. This is your bounden duty, and if you do not so God will pronounce you not a Christian but a thief and robber. In the first place, because you are an idler and do not support yourself, but live by the sweat and toil of others; in the second place, because you withhold from your neighbor what you plainly owe him. Where now shall we find those who keep this commandment? Indeed, where should we dare look for them except where no people live? But such a class of people should Christians be. Therefore, let each of us beware lest he deceive himself; for God will not be mocked nor deceived. Galatians 6:7.

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