

4 Fourth & Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Matthew 8-23-27 -- Colossians 3-12-17

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

I. OF FAITH AND UNBELIEF.

1. This Gospel, as a narrative, gives us an example of faith and unbelief, in order that we may learn how mighty the power of faith is, and that it of necessity has to do with great and terrible things and that it accomplishes nothing but wonders; and that on the other hand unbelief is so fainthearted, shamefaced and trembling with fear that it can do nothing whatever. An illustration of this we see in this experience of the disciples, which shows the real state of their hearts. First, as they in company with Christ entered the ship, all was calm and they experienced nothing unusual, and had any one asked them if they believed, they would have answered, Yes. But they were not conscious of how their hearts trusted in the calm sea and the signs for fair weather, and that thus their faith was founded upon what their natural eyes saw. But when the tempest comes and the waves fill the boat, their faith vanishes; because the calm and peace in which they trusted took wings and flew away, therefore they fly with the calm and peace, and nothing is left but unbelief.

2. But what is this unbelief able to do? It sees nothing but what it experiences. It does not experience life, salvation and safety; but instead the waves coming into the boat and the sea threatening them with death and every danger. And because they experience these things and give heed to them and turn not their fear from them, trembling and despair can not be suppressed. Yea, the more they see and experience it the harder death and despair torment them and every moment threatens to devour them. But unbelief cannot avoid such experiences and cannot think otherwise even for a second. For it has nothing besides to which it can hold and comfort itself, and therefore it has no peace or rest for a single minute. And thus will it also be in perdition, where there will be nothing but despair, trembling and fear, and that without end.

3. But had they had faith, it would have driven the wind and the waves of the sea out of their minds, and pictured before their eyes in place of the wind and tempest the power and grace of God, promised in his Word; and it would have relied upon that Word, as though anchored to an immovable rock and would not float on the water, and as though the sun shined brightly and all was calm and no storm was raging. For it is the great characteristic and power of faith to see what is not visible, and not to see what is visible, yea, that which at the time drives and oppresses us; just as unbelief can see only what is visible and can not in the least cleave to what is invisible.

4. Therefore God bestows faith to the end that it should deal not with ordinary things, but with things no human being can master as death, sin, the world and Satan. For the whole world united is unable to stand before death, but flees from and is terrified by it, and is also conquered by it; but faith stands firm, opposes death that devours everything, and triumphs over it and even swallows the unsatiated devourer of life. In like manner no one can control or subdue the flesh, but it reigns everywhere in the world, and what it wills must be done, so that the whole world thereby is carnal; but faith lays hold of the flesh and subdues and bridles it, so that it must become a servant. And in like manner no one can endure the rage, persecution, and blasphemy, infamy, hatred and envy of the world; every one retreats and falls back exhausted before it, it gets the upper hand over all and triumphs; and if they are without faith it mocks them besides and treads all under its feet, and takes pleasure and delight in doing so.

5. Further, who could conquer Satan with his innumerable, subtle suggestions and temptations, by which he hinders the truth and God's Word, faith and hope, and starts so many false doctrines, sects, seductions, heresies, doubts, superstitions and innumerable abominations? The whole world compared with him is like a spark of fire compared with a fountain of water. All must be here subject to him; as we also see, hear and understand. But it is faith that keeps him busy, and it not only stands before him invulnerable, but also reveals his roguery and puts him to shame, so that his deception fails and he faints and falls; as now takes place with his indulgences and his papacy. Just so no one can allay and quiet the least sin, but it bites and devours the conscience, so that nothing avails even if the whole world were to comfort and support such a person, he must be cast down into perdition. Here faith is a hero, it appeases all sins, even if they were as many as the whole world had committed.

6. Is there now not something almighty and inexpressible about faith that it can withstand all our powerful enemies and gain the victory, so that St. John says in his first Epistle 5,4: "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith?" Not that this is done in peace and by quietly resting; for it is a battle that is carried on not without wounds and shedding of blood. Yea, the heart so severely experiences in this battle sin and death, the flesh, Satan and the world, that it has no other thought than that it is lost, that sin and death have triumphed, and that Satan holds the field of battle. The power of faith however experiences but little of that. This is set forth in our narrative, when the waves not only dashed into the boat, but even covered it, so that it was about to go under and sink, and Christ was lying asleep. Just

then there was no hope of life, death had the upper hand and had triumphed; life was lying prostrate and was lost.

7. As it went here, so it goes and must go in all other temptations of sin, Satan, etc. We must experience how sin has taken captive the conscience and nothing but wrath and perdition wish to reign, and how we must be eternally lost. Satan must start so many things by his error and false teaching that it appears God's Word must fall to the ground and the world must glory in falsehood. Likewise the world must rage and persecute to such an extent that it appears no one can stand or be saved, or even confess his faith; but Cain will rule alone and will not rest until his brother is dead, so that he may never be in his way. But we must not judge and act according to appearance and our experience, but according to our faith.

8. Therefore this Gospel is a comforting example and doctrine, how we should conduct ourselves, so that we may not despair in the agony of sin, in the peril of death, and in the tumult of the world; but be assured that we are not lost, although the waves at once overwhelm our little boat; that we will not perish, although we experience in our evil conscience sin, wrath, and the lack of grace; that we will not die, although the whole world hates and persecutes us, although it opens its jaws as wide as the rosy dawn of the morning. These are all waves that fall over your little bark, cause to despair, and force you to cry out: "Save, Lord; we perish". Thus you have here the first part of this Gospel, faith, how it should thrive and succeed, and besides, how incapable and fainthearted unbelief is.

II. OF LOVE.

9. The second part of our text, treating of love, shows forth Christ in that he rises, breaks his sleep for their sake, takes to heart their need as though it were his own, and ministers to them help out of free love without any merit on their part. He neither receives nor seeks any reward for his help, but permits them to enjoy and use his power and resources. For as we have often heard it is characteristic of Christian love to do all freely and gratuitously, to the praise and honor of God, that a Christian lives upon the earth for the sake of such love, just as Christ lived solely for the purpose of doing good; as he himself says: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Mt 20,28.

III. THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THIS NARRATIVE.

10. Christ pictured to us in this narrative the Christian life, especially the office of the ministry. The ship, signifies Christendom; the sea, the world; the wind, Satan; his disciples are the preachers and pious Christians; Christ is the truth, the Gospel, and faith.

11. Now, before Christ entered the ship with his disciples the sea and the wind were calm; but when Christ with his disciples entered, then the storm began, as he himself says, Mt 10, 34: "Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace but a sword." So, if Christ had left the world in peace and never punished its works, then it would indeed

have been quiet. But since he preaches that the wise are fools, the saints are sinners and the rich are lost, they become wild and raging; just as at present some critics think it would be fine if we merely preached the Gospel and allowed the office of the ministry to continue in its old way. This they would indeed tolerate; but that all their doings should be rebuked and avail nothing, that they call preaching discontent and revolution, and is not Christian teaching.

12. But what does this Gospel say? There was a violent tempest on the lake when Christ and his disciples were in the ship. The sea and the wind allowed the other ships to sail in calm weather; but this ship had to suffer distress because of Christ being in it. The world can indeed tolerate all kinds of preaching except the preaching of Christ. Hence whenever he comes and wherever he is, there he preaches that he only is right and reproves all others; as he says in Mt 12,30: "He that is not with me is against me", and again, Jn 16,8: "The spirit will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment;" he says that he will not only preach, but that he will convict the whole world and what is in the world. But it is this convicting that causes such tempests and dangers to this ship. Should he preach that he would allow the world to go unpunished and to continue in its old ways, he would have kept quiet before and never have entered the world; for if the world is good and is not to be convicted then there would never have been any need of him coming into the world.

13. Now it is the consolation of Christians, and especially of preachers, to be sure and ponder well that when they present and preach Christ, that they must suffer persecution, and nothing can prevent it; and that it is a very good sign of the preaching being truly Christian, when they are thus persecuted, especially by the great, the saintly, the learned and the wise. And on the other hand that their preaching is not right, when it is praised and honored, as Christ says in Lk 6,22-26: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you; for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake; in the same manner did their fathers to the prophets." Behold our preachers, how their teachings are esteemed; the wealth, honor and power of the world have them fully under their control, and still they wish to be Christian teachers, and whosoever praises and preaches their ideas, lives in honor and luxury.

14. Hence, people have here an example where they are to seek their comfort and help, not in the world; they are not to guard the wisdom and power of men, but Christ himself and him alone; they are to cleave to him and depend on him in every need with all faithfulness and confidence as the disciples do in our text. For had they not believed that he would help them, they would not have awakened him and called upon him. True their faith was weak and was mingled with much unbelief, so that they did not perfectly and freely surrender themselves to Christ and risk their life with him, nor did they believe he could rescue them in the midst of the sea and save them from death. Thus it is ordained that the Word of God has no master nor judge, no protector or patron can be given it besides God himself. It is his Word. Therefore, as he left it go forth without any merit or counsel of men, so will he himself without any human help and strength administer and defend it. And whoever seeks

protection and comfort in these things among men, will both fall and fail, and be forsaken by both God and man.

15. That Jesus slept indicates the condition of their hearts, namely, that they had a weak, sleepy faith, but especially that at the time of persecution Christ withdraws and acts as though he were asleep, and gives neither strength nor power, neither peace nor rest, but lets us worry and labor in our weakness, and permits us to experience that we are nothing at all and that all depends upon his grace and power, as Paul confesses in 2 Cor 1, 9, that he had to suffer great affliction, so as to learn to trust not in himself but in God, who raised the dead. Such a sleeping on the part of God David often experienced and refers to it in many places, as when he says in Ps 44,23: ***”Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? Arise, cast us not off forever.”***

16. The summary of this Gospel is this, it gives us two comforting, defying proverbs, that when persecution for the sake of God's Word arises, we may say: I indeed thought Christ was in the ship, therefore the sea and wind rage, and the waves dash over us and threaten to sink us; but let them rage, it is ordained that the wind and sea obey his will. The persecutions will not continue longer than is his pleasure; and although they overwhelm us, yet they must be subject to him; he is Lord over all, therefore nothing will harm us. May he only give us his help that we may not despair in unbelief. Amen.

17. That the people marveled and praised the Lord that the wind and sea were subject to him, signifies that the Gospel, God's Word, spreads farther through persecution, it thus becomes stronger and faith increases; and this is also a paradoxical characteristic of the Gospel compared with all worldly things which decrease through every misfortune and opposition, and increase through prosperity and peace. Christ's kingdom grows through tribulations and declines in times of peace, ease and luxury, as St. Paul says in 2 Cor 12, 9: ”My power is made perfect in weakness, etc.” To this end help us God! Amen.



First Page



Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Colossians 3:12-17

THE GLORIOUS ADORNMENT OF CHRISTIANS

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

1. This text is also a letter of admonition, teaching what manner of fruit properly results from faith. Paul deals kindly with the Colossians. He does not command, urge nor threaten, as teachers of the Law must do in the case of those under the Law. He persuades them with loving words in view of the blessing and grace of God received, and in the light of Christ's own example. Christians should act with readiness and cheerfulness, being moved neither by fear of punishment nor by desire for reward, as frequently before stated. This admonition has been so oft repeated in the preceding epistle lesson that we know, I trust, what constitutes a Christian. Therefore we will but briefly touch on the subject.

”Put on, therefore.”

2. In the epistle for New Year's day we have sufficiently explained the meaning of ”putting on”; how by faith we put on Christ, and he us; how in love we put on our neighbor, and our neighbor us. The Christian apparel is of two kinds – faith and love. Christ wore two manner of garments – one whole and typical of faith, the other divided and typical of love. Paul here has reference to the latter garment, love. He would teach us Christians the manner of ornaments and apparel we are to wear in the world; not silk or precious gold. To women these are forbidden of Peter (I Pet 3,3), and of Paul (1 Tim 2, 9). Love for our neighbor is a garment well befitting us – that love which leads us to concern ourselves about the neighbor and his misfortunes. Such love is called the ornament of a Christian character – an ornament in the eyes of men.

3. Observe the tender and sacred style of the apostle's admonition, a style he is wont to use toward us. He does not drive us with laws, but persuades by reminding us of the ineffable grace of God; for he terms us the "elect of God," and "holy" and "beloved." He would call forth the fruits of faith, desiring them to be yielded in a willing, cheerful and happy spirit. The individual who sincerely believes and trusts that before God he is beloved, holy and elect, will consider how to sustain his honors and titles, how to conduct himself worthily of them; more, he will love God with a fervor enabling him to do or omit, or to suffer, all things cheerfully, and will never know how to do enough. But he who doubts such attitude of God toward himself will not recognize the force of these words. He will not feel the power of the statement that we are holy, beloved, elect, in the sight of God.

4. Let us disregard, therefore, the saints who elect and love themselves; who adorn themselves with the works of the Law; who observe fasts and discipline; who regard raiment and position, for they are unwilling to be sinners before God. Our ornaments are unlike these, and not associated with such mockeries. They are honesty, sincerity, good works, service to our neighbor. We are unfettered by laws regarding food, raiment, times, etc. We are holy in the sight of God, before whom none can be holy until he sees himself a sinner and rejects his own righteousness. But the class mentioned are holy in their own estimation; therefore, they ever remain wicked – sinners in the sight of God. We are beloved of God because we despise ourselves, we judge and condemn ourselves and reject our self-love. The others, because they love and esteem themselves, are despicable and unacceptable in the sight of God. Again, we are chosen of God for the reason that we despise ourselves as filth. Such God chooses, and has chosen from eternity. Because the would-be saints elect themselves, God will reject them, as indeed he has from eternity. Now, this is what Paul means by these words,

"A heart of compassion."

5. They stand for a part of the ornament, the beautiful, charming Christian jewel, that becomes us better in the sight of God than pearls, precious stones, silk and gold become us in the eyes of the world. "A heart of compassion" is evidence of the true Christian. Paul would say: "Not simply in external deed, or in appearance, are ye to be merciful, but in the inmost heart." He refers to that sincere and wholesouled mercy characteristic of the father and mother who witness the distress of a child for whom they would readily expose their lives or sacrifice all they possess. The Christian's mind and heart should be constantly devoted to merciful deeds, with an ardor so intense as to make him unaware he is doing good and compassionate acts.

6. With this single phrase Paul condemns the works and arbitrary rules of hypocritical saints, whose severity will not permit them to associate with sinners. Their rigorous laws must be all-controlling. They do nothing but compel and drive. They exhibit no mercy, but perpetual reproach, censure, condemnation, blame and bluster. They can endure no imperfection. But among Christians many are sinners, many infirm. In fact, Christians associate only with these; not with saints. Christians reject none, but bear with all. Indeed, they are as sincerely interested for sinners as they would be for themselves were they the infirm. They pray for

the sinners, teach, admonish, persuade, do all in their power to reclaim. Such is the true character of a Christian. So God, in Christ, has dealt with us and ever deals. So Christ dealt with the adulteress (Jn 8, 11) when he released her from her tormentors, and with his gracious words influenced her to repentance and suffered her to depart. We read of St. Antony having said that Paphrutius knew how souls are to be saved, because he rescued a certain individual from brethren who persecuted and oppressed him for his transgression. See "Lives of the Fathers." Were God to deal with us according to the rigor of his laws, we should all be lost. But he mercifully suspends the Law. Isaiah says (ch. 9. 4): "For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken." God now only persuades.

7. Note how involved in the Law and in hypocrisy they still are who esteem themselves prominent saints and at the same time are intolerant of the infirmities of Christians. If they fail to find perfect holiness – a miracle of purity-in those who possess Christ and know the Gospel, then nothing is as it should be; the heavens are on the point of falling and the earth about to be destroyed. They can only judge, censure and deride, saying: "Oh, yes, he is truly evangelical; indeed, he is a visionary!" Thus they indicate their utter blindness. With the beam constantly in their own eyes, they show how little they know of Christ. Know, then, when you meet one so ready to censure and condemn, one requiring absolute perfection in Christians – know that such a one is merely an enforcer of the Law, a base hypocrite, a merciless jailer, with no true knowledge of Christ. As, with Christians, there is no law but all is love, so neither can there be judgment, condemnation and censure. And he who calls another a visionary is certainly a visionary ten-fold himself. In the thing for which he judges and condemns another, he condemns himself. Since he ignores mercy and all but the Law, he finds no mercy in the sight of God; in fact, he has never experienced, never tasted, God's mercy. To his taste, both God and neighbor are bitter as gall and wormwood.

8. But tender mercy is to be shown only to Christians and only among Christians. With the rejecters and persecutors of the Gospel we must deal differently. It is not right that my charity be liberal enough to tolerate unsound doctrine. In the case of false faith and doctrine there is neither love nor patience. Against these it is my duty earnestly to contend and not to yield a hair's breadth. Otherwise – when faith is not imperiled – I must be unfailingly kind and merciful to all notwithstanding the infirmities of their lives. I may not censure, oppress nor drive; I must persuade, entreat and tolerate. A defective life does not destroy Christianity; it exercises it. But defective doctrine – false belief – destroys all good. So, then, toleration and mercy are not permissible in the case of unsound doctrine; only anger, opposition and death are in order, yet always in accordance with the Word of God.

9. On the other hand, they who are mercifully tolerated must not imagine that because they escape censure and force, their beliefs and practices are right. They must not construe such mercy as encouragement to become indolent and negligent, and to continue in their error. Mercy is not extended them with any such design. The object is to give them opportunity to recover zeal and strength. But if they be disposed to remain as they are, very well; let them alone. They will not long continue thus; the devil will lead them farther astray, until finally

they will completely apostatize, even becoming enemies to the Gospel. Such will be their end if they permit mercy to be lavished upon them in vain. We may not be indolent and asleep in the matter of our false doctrines, relying upon the fact that we are not despised nor constrained of men. There is particular need to be active and diligent, for the devil neither sleeps nor rests. We need beware that he does not lead us where we will never enjoy God's mercy.

”Kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering.”

10. These words represent the other elements of Christian character. Kindness you will find defined in the second epistle lesson for the early Christmas service. It characterizes the conduct of the individual who is gentle and sympathetic to all; who repels none with forbidding countenance, harsh words or rude deportment. We Germans would call such a one affable and friendly disposed. Kindness is a virtue not confined to certain works; it modifies the whole life. The kindly person is obliging to everyone, not displeased with any, and is attractive to all men. In contrast are those peculiar characters who have pleasure in nothing but their own conceits; who insist on others accommodating themselves to them and their ways, while they yield to none. Such individuals are termed ”uncivil.”

11. But the liberality of kindness is not to be extended to false doctrine. Only relative to conduct and works is it to be exercised. As oft before stated, love with all its works and fruits has no place in the matter of unsound doctrine. I must love my neighbor and show him kindness whatever the imperfections of his life. But if he refuses to believe or to teach sound doctrine, I cannot, I dare not, love him or show him kindness. According to Paul (Gal 1, 8-9), I must hold him excommunicated and accursed, even though he be an angel from heaven. Thus remarkably do faith and love differ and are distinct. Love will be, must be, kind even to the bitterest enemy so long as he assails not faith and doctrine. But it will not, it cannot, tolerate the individual who does, be it father, mother or dearest friend. Deut 13, 6-8. Love, then, must be exercised, not in relation to the doctrine and faith of our neighbor, but relative to his life and works. Faith, on the contrary, has to do, not with his works and life, but with his doctrine and belief.

12. I think we must know by this time the meaning of ”lowliness” of mind – esteeming one's self least and others greater. As Christ illustrates it, occupying the lowest seat at the wedding, and this cheerfully. We are to serve even when our service is not desired, and to minister unto our enemies. So Christ humbled himself before Judas the betrayer, and before all of us. He came, not to be served, but to serve. That humbleness of mind is a rare virtue is not to be wondered at, for every Christian grace is a rarity. Particularly are graces lacking with those who, professing to know most of Christ, find something to censure in all Christians. Christianity Paul calls a mystery of God; and it is likely to continue so.

13. ”Meekness” is opposed to anger. The meek man is not easily excited to exhibit anger, to curse, smite, hate, or wish evil to any, even an enemy. To refrain thus is an art. Hypocrites – in fact, all the world – can be meek toward friends and those who treat them well. But true meekness and humility will remain only among the elect and beloved saints of God, as Paul

here implies. Even among these are many deficient in all, or at least a large part, of the Christian graces. Hypocrites may thus find something to censure, something whereat to be offended, in the beloved, elect saints of God. And the true saints have occasion to exercise mercy, humility, meekness and forbearance. They whom Paul here terms elect and beloved saints of God, though slightly deficient in humility, meekness and forbearance, are not therefore unholy, not rejected and despised.

14. Paul makes a distinction between longsuffering and forbearance, as in Romans 2, 4: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?" In "longsuffering" we have the thought here and there expressed by God in the Psalms and elsewhere by the Hebrew "arich apaim" – "slow to wrath." God patiently bears with evil. Indeed, he repeatedly delays vengeance, apparently more ready to forgive than to punish, even under extreme provocation and having just reason to chastise. Longsuffering extends farther than patience. Patience bears evil and injustice; but longsuffering delays punishment. It does not design to punish; it would not take hasty revenge. Unlike the revengeful, it wishes no one evil. Many we see, indeed, who suffer much and are patient but at the same time trust in a final avenging. The longsuffering Christian, however, is opposed to revenge, desiring the sinner to amend his ways.

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye."

15. In this verse all law is abolished among Christians. One is not permitted to demand, through process of law, the recovery of his property. He must forgive and yield. Christ's example enjoins this principle; he has forgiven us. And what is the extent of his forgiveness? He pardons past sins, but that is not all; as John says (1 Jn 2, 1-2), *"If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteousness and he is the propitiation for our sins."*

16. Note, it is the true Christian saints whom Paul describes, but he looks upon them as infirm to the extent of offending and complaining against one another. This is a state of affairs by no means becoming Christians and saints. So I say Christ's kingdom is a mystery obscure beyond the power of our preaching and teaching sufficiently to explain. Unbelievers cannot be induced to work, but believers cannot be withheld from working. Some would not believe and some would not love.

It is true of Christ's kingdom that his Christians are not perfectly holy. They have begun to be holy and are in a state of progression. There are still to be found among them anger, evil desire, unholy love, worldly care and other deplorable infirmities, remains of the old Adam. Paul speaks of these things as burdens which one must bear for a neighbor (Gal 6, 2), and in Romans 15, 1, he admonishes us to "bear the infirmities of the weak." Likewise Christ loved his apostles much and suffered much from them, and he still daily bears with his own.

17. Some, enumerating the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5, 22-23, say a Christian should be gentle, meek, longsuffering, chaste; and they look upon this passage as a

law commanding such fruits. Hence they refuse to recognize as Christians any who fail to possess the fruits in perfection. Now, such individuals cannot believe there is a Christ, certain as the fact is. They judge malignantly, complaining that Christians do not exist. They take offense at Christ for his superior wisdom. For Christ has given us scriptural authority for knowing Christians by their fruits. He says (Mt 7, 16), "By their fruits ye shall know them." Here they are emphatic.

18. Can you locate the failure of such an individual? He fails in the fact that he understands absolutely nothing of Christ's kingdom. For he misinterprets the passages referring to Christians. He understands the statement that Christians should be kind and meek, to mean they must never become angry, must bear anything and show impatience toward none; if they do not so, they cannot be Christians, for they have not the fruits. Dear man, what but his own blindness can lead him to such a conclusion? He fancies Christianity to be a holy order of perfection, altogether without infirmity, a perfection as in heaven among the angels. But tell me, where do the Scriptures speak thus of Christians? But whoso recognizes Christianity as a progressive order yet in its beginning, will not be offended at the occasional manifestation of ungentleness, unkindness and impatience on the part of a Christian; for he remembers that Christians are commanded to bear one another's burdens and infirmities. He knows that the enumeration of the fruits of the Spirit is not a record of laws the observance of which is imperative or Christ will be denied. He is aware the passage is to be interpreted as meaning that Christians are to strive to be kind; that is the mark at which they aim. However, even though they have made a beginning and some progress in this virtue, they often are unkind and bear fruits directly the opposite of the fruits of the Spirit. True, the text quoted says we should be kind, but it does not say we are kind. We are tending toward it, we are in a state of progression; but during the progress much of the old and as yet untransformed nature is intermingled.

19. Know, then, that in a mysterious way Christ is in his saints, and beware of judging or condemning anyone when you have not positive assurance that he believes and teaches contrary to the Gospel. But whoso does oppose the Gospel, you may safely judge to be without Christ, and under the sway of the devil. Pray for such a one and admonish him, in the hope of his conversion. But in the case of one who endorses and honors the Gospel, observe Paul's comment (Rom 14, 4): "Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be made to stand; for the Lord hath power to make him stand." And again (I Cor 10, 12): "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Christ would be at the same time hidden and revealed, found and not found. He permits the intermingling of some infirmities with the fruits of the Spirit, that he may conceal himself, and that malicious judges may be offended.

"And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness."

20. From longsuffering and meekness the apostle distinguishes love and other jewels of spiritual beauty whereof we have already heard, though all are comprehended in love. As faith is the chief element of Christian character, so love is chief of the fruits of the Spirit, the

jewel of surpassing beauty. Therefore Paul says, "Above all these things put on love." Love transcends mercy, kindness, meekness and humility. Paul calls it "the bond of perfectness" because it unites human hearts; not a partial unity, based on similarity or close relationship, but a complete unity among all men and in all relations. It makes us of one mind, one heart, one desire. It permits no one to originate a peculiar order of doctrine or faith. All who love are of the same belief. Consequently there is the same purpose of heart with the poor and the rich, with rulers and subjects, the ill and the well, the high and the low, the honored and the disgraced. The loving heart permits all to share in its good; more, it participates in the adversities of all men, regarding them as its own. Where love is, perfect unity and communion obtain in every event, good or bad. It is a most perfect bond.

21. Where love is lacking, hearts are united and aims single in but few relations; in most things there is disagreement. For instance: Robbers have a common bond, but it is no more than a common purpose in committing robbery and murder. Worldly friends are of the same mind so far as concerns their own interests. Monks are united in relation to their order and their honor. Herod and Pilate agreed, but simply in regard to Christ. For the most part it is exceptional that one monk, priest or layman agrees with another. Their bond of union is weak; they are as chaff bound with straw.

"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which also ye were called."

22. There is much to threaten the sundering of love's bond. The devil never sleeps, but continually stirs up discord and unrest. Paul does not deny that the bond is assailed. But he exhorts us to resist, remembering that love must be exercised by opposition. He admonishes us to let the peace of Christ have dominion in our hearts. The thought of the verse is: Though the peace of the world and the flesh abides not, though you must witness the forces of discord and disruption, nevertheless let your hearts have peace in Christ. We spoke of the peace of God in the epistle selection for the Fourth Sunday in Advent- Philippians 4, 7. This is the peace whereunto the Gospel calls; not the peace of the world, the flesh or the devil, but the peace that passeth all understanding, of which Paul tells us. We are to hold the peace of God, not only when all is well, but when sin, death, the flesh, the world and all calamities rage.

"And be ye thankful."

23. "Thankfulness" here may be taken in either of two senses: First, thankfulness toward God, Paul's thought being: Let the remembrance of all God has done for you move you to gratitude for his grace and mercy, a gratitude to which shall succeed love and peace. Secondly, we may understand thankfulness toward men-gratitude for all the benefits received from our fellows. The apostle elsewhere (2 Tim 3, 2) speaks of there being, in the last days, among other vices, that of "unthankfulness" of men toward each other. Let everyone make choice for himself of the two applications. It is my opinion, since Paul later takes up the subject of gratitude to God, and since he is here handling that of love to our neighbor – it is my opinion he has reference here to gratitude to our fellowmen. This, I think,

is his meaning. Man is glad to have love shown him; he is quite willing to receive good from others and to be dealt with according to the Gospel. At the same time, he is not disposed to manifest love to his fellows: favors shown him are lost upon his ingratitude. Though love is not defeated by ungratefulness – for it bears all things (I Cor 13, 7) – yet unthankfulness produces weariness and aversion; and it is a base, unjust and shameful thing for one who continually lends assistance not to be served in return.

24. Paul says on this topic (Gal 6, 6), "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." And he declares (1 Tim 5, 17) that they who labor in the Word and doctrine are worthy of double honor. In the ninth chapter of First Corinthians he speaks at length on how teachers are entitled to support, saying the mouth of the threshing ox should not be muzzled; that would be gross ingratitude. Of such unthankfulness he here hints. It is true today, and ever has been, that preachers of the Word of God must in general seek their own bread, and receive ingratitude as their reward for the wonderful blessings they confer. Were it their part to celebrate masses and indulgences, gratitude would be forthcoming; great would be the gifts and service rendered them as expression of thankfulness. But just as ungratefully were the Levites treated under the old Law, in contrast with the favor shown the priests of idols and groves.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God."

25. This verse appropriately follows the injunction to be thankful. Paul would say: Be careful to honor teachers and preachers, being grateful that they handle the Word and may richly impart it to you. I do not imagine Paul refers to the giving of the Word of God from heaven, for it is not within man's power to so give it; God alone can commit it to us. So he has done and continues to do. On every occasion when he permits the Gospel to be preached, he showers the message upon us abundantly, withholding no essential knowledge. But, after it is given, we ought to be thankful and to faithfully read and hear it, sing and speak it, and meditate upon it day and night. And it should be our part to secure teachers enough to minister it to us liberally and continuously. This is what is meant by letting the Word of God dwell among us richly.

26. Satiated, indolent spirits soon grow tired and dismiss their pastors to go wherever they wish. The latter are forced to seek a living by other work, and thus God's Word is neglected and becomes rare and thinly sown in the land. Nehemiah (ch. 13, 10) complains that the Levites, because of lack of support, were forced to leave their worship and temple and flee to the fields or start false worship and fables to mislead the people. They then received enough to exist – they became wealthy. It has come about in the Christian Church that as often as the support of godly pastors and teachers has grown to be a burden, as Augustine laments has been the case, these have been either forced to neglect the Word to labor for their own support, or forced to invent that wretched, accursed worship now prevalent throughout the world and whereby the preachers have attained lordly position. With the

revival of the Gospel the financial difficulty mentioned is recurring, and it will continue to recur. One hundred dollars cannot now be raised for the support of a good schoolmaster or preacher where formerly a thousand dollars – yes, incomputible sums – were contributed toward churches, institutions, masses, vigils and the like. Once more God punishes ingratitude by permitting his preachers to withdraw wholly from the ministry and to engage in their own support, or by sending upon the people even greater delusions than ever, which defraud them of wealth and destroy body and soul. For they refuse to let the Word of God dwell among them richly. Paul adds the modifying phrase:

”In all wisdom.”

27. Were we to have the Word of God so richly as to bring in every street corner, to be sung everywhere by all children – as they designed who into the pulpits and the lessons introduced canonical prayers and singing and reading – what would all this profit without an understanding mind – without wisdom? For the Word of God was given to make us wise. It was intended that we should understand it; that it should be preached and sung intelligibly. And they who minister it, who sing and speak it, ought to be wise, understanding everything pertaining to the salvation of the soul and the honor of God. That is what it means to have the Word of God dwell among us in all wisdom. Here Paul briefly overthrows the vociferous practices of the churches and monasteries where so much preaching and reading obtain while at the same time the Gospel is not understood. He seems to have foreseen the coming time when the Word of God should freely prevail, but with no resulting wisdom; the time when men should daily increase in ignorance and fanaticism until they should become mere dolts, so completely void of wisdom as to call vociferation and boasting divine worship, and to regard that preaching the salvation of souls.

28. What it is to teach and to admonish has been frequently explained. Here Paul makes the duty of instruction common to all Christians – ”teaching and admonishing one another.” That is, aside from the regular office of preaching, each is to teach himself and others, thus making everyday use of the Word of God, publicly and privately, generally and specially.

29. As I see it, the apostle's distinction of the three words – psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – is this: ”psalms” properly indicates those productions of David and others constituting the Book of Psalms; ”hymns” refers to the songs of the prophets occasionally mentioned in the Scriptures – songs of Moses, Deborah, Solomon, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, with the Magnificat, the Benediction, and the like, called ”Canticles”; ”spiritual songs” are those not written in the Scriptures but of daily origin with men. Paul calls these latter ”spiritual” to a greater degree than psalms and hymns, though he recognizes those as themselves spiritual. He forbids worldly, sensual and unbecoming songs, desiring us to sing of spiritual things. It is then that our songs are calculated to benefit and instruct, as he says.

30. But what is the significance of Paul's phrase ”with grace”? I offer the explanation that he refers to the grace of God and means that the singing of spiritual songs is to be voluntary, uncompelled, spontaneous, rendered with cheerfulness and prompted by love; not extorted

by authority and law, as is the singing in our churches today. No one sings, preaches or prays from a recognition of mercy and grace received. The motive is a hope for gain, or a fear of punishment, injury and shame; or again, the holiest individuals bind themselves to obedience, or are driven to it, for the sake of winning heaven, and not at all to further the knowledge of the Word of God – the understanding of it richly and in all wisdom, as Paul desires it to be understood. I imagine Paul has in mind the charm of music and the beauty of poetry incident to song. He says in Ephesians 4, 29: "Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear." Likewise should songs be calculated to bring grace and favor to them who hear. Foul, unchaste and superfluous words have no place therein, nor have any inappropriate elements, elements void of significance and without virtue and life. Hymns are to be rich in meaning, to be pleasing and sweet, and thus productive of enjoyment for all hearers. The singing of such songs is very properly called in Hebrew singing "with grace," as Paul has it. Of this character of songs are the psalms and hymns of the Scriptures; they are good thoughts presented in pleasing words. Some songs, though expressed in charming words, are worldly and carnal; while others presenting good thoughts are at the same time expressed in words inappropriate, unattractive and devoid of grace.

"Singing with grace in your hearts unto God."

31. Paul does not enjoin silence of the lips. He would have words of the mouth proceed from the heart sincerely and fervently; not hypocritically, as Isaiah mentions (ch. 29, 13), saying: "This people draw nigh unto me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me." Paul would have the Word of God to dwell among Christians generally, and richly to be spoken, sung and meditated upon everywhere; and that understandingly and productive of spiritual fruit, the Word being universally prized. He would that men thus sing unto the Lord heartfelt praise and thanks. He says let the Word "dwell" among you. Not merely lodge as a guest for a night or two, but abide with you forever. He is constantly apprehensive of human doctrines.

"And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

32. The works of Christians are not circumscribed by name, time nor place. Whatever Christians do is good; whenever done it is timely; wherever wrought it is appropriately. So Paul names no work. He makes no distinction, but concludes all works good, whether it be eating or drinking, speaking or keeping silence, waking or sleeping, going or staying, being idle or otherwise. All acts are eminently worthy because done in the name of the Lord Jesus. Such is Paul's teaching here. And our works are wrought in the name of the Lord Jesus when we by faith hold fast the fact that Christ is in us and we in him in the sense that we no longer labor but he lives and works in us. Paul says (Gal 2, 20), "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." But when we do a work as of ourselves, then it is wrought in our own name and there is nothing good about it.

33. The expression "in the name of God," or "Go in the name of Jesus," is frequently uttered falsely and in sheer hypocrisy. The saying is, "All misfortunes rise in the name of God." For teachers of false doctrines habitually offer their commodities in the name of God. They even come in the name of Christ, as he himself foretells. Mt 24, 24. To sincerely and earnestly speak and work in Jesus' name, necessarily the heart must accord with the utterances of the mouth. As the lips declare in the name of God, so must the heart confidently, with firm faith, hold that God directs and performs the work. Peter teaches the same (1 Pet 4, 11): "If any man ministereth [perform anything], ministering as of the strength which God supplieth." Then will the venture prosper. No Christian should undertake to do any deed in his own ability and directed by his own judgment. Rather let him be assured that, God works with and through him. Paul says (I Cor 9, 26): "I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air."

34. Such an attitude will result in praise and thanks to God as the one to whom are due all honor and praise for every good thing. So Paul teaches and also Peter. Immediately after declaring that we are to work according to the ability which God gives, Peter adds "that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." But he who undertakes anything in his own ability, however he may glorify God with his lips, lies and deceives, like the hypocrite in the Gospel. Thankfulness, therefore, is the only duty we can perform unto God; and this is not to be rendered of ourselves, but through our Mediator, Jesus. Without him none can come to the Father, none can be accepted. Of this fact we have often spoken.

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