



## THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

August 5, 2012

### *"The God Pleasing Conduct of a True Christian"*

Sermon Text, First Peter 3:8-15:

*"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:" (KJV)*

My Dear Christians,

Many people have the idea that to be a Christian you only need to know the revealed information about God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In fact, it has become somewhat of a fad to call oneself a Christian.

And this based solely on the fact that one has memorized a few simple Scripture passages, can accurately tell some Bible stories remembered from attendance at Sunday school long ago, and perhaps enjoys the way listening to Christian music makes them feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

Never mind that these same individuals who call themselves Christians, willingly use the name of God in vain, see nothing wrong with stealing from their employers, cheating on their spouses, or staying away from God's House, going, instead, to their local gambling establishment, where they quickly throw away what God has so graciously given them.

Today there are many who are considered by the children of this world to be great men and women of faith, based upon the fact they have attended religious colleges and seminaries, studied diligently, and earned for themselves a masters or doctorate degree in a field of study associated with God and religion.

Many consider such high academic achievement and the accompanying social status as sure evidence a person possesses true Christian faith and are thus fit to counsel and perhaps even pastor a congregation of souls hungry and thirsting for the whole Truth of God's Word. Never mind the

fact that so many of these well educated men and women have decided for themselves and their congregations which teachings of God's Holy Word they will accept and which they will reject.

Instead of faithfully relying upon the Bible as the only source and norm of Christian life, they openly promote women serving as pastors, preach toleration of homosexuality, spiritual fellowship with churches that teach false doctrine, and the murder of the unborn through abortion; all of which, according to Holy Scripture, is an abomination – Sin – in the sight of God.

Some believe a person is a Christian only if they have and are fully intellectually aware of what has come to be known as a 'religious experience'. These so-called 'religious experiences' erroneously rely upon the notion that a free and uninhibited expression of human emotion is somehow evidence the individual has personally decided to 'accept Christ' and that they have thereby become Christians as an act and merit of their own will and doing.

They are encouraged to "feel" the Holy Spirit moving about the room in which they are gathered and to "feel" the anointing of the Holy Spirit in their physical bodies, which at the very suggestion, cause some to break forth in uncontrollable fits of laughter, or quake and shake and fall back to the floor as though struck by some unseen force.

Many consider such experiences as evidence of true Christian faith.

But such so called "religious experiences" are nothing more than short-lived, adrenaline-powered rushes of self-induced emotionalism, initiated by the manipulative talents of evil men who have learned to bring their eager audiences to such deluded euphoric states of mind. And this to easily gain for themselves power and position in the church, and with it much sought after financial gain.

Dear Friends, though-out the Epistles, the necessity of faith is indeed emphasized.

For it is by grace alone through faith alone, worked in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments, whereby we lay hold of and personally receive the free and unmerited gift of the Forgiveness of Sins, life and salvation, which have been purchased and won for the whole world, not with gold or silver, but with the precious innocent blood sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

What then is the evidence of true Christian faith?

We find the answer in the explanation of the Second Article of our faith:

*"That I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."*

This then is the evidence of true Christian faith. The fulfillment of God's purpose in coming to save us who were once lost and condemned to sin and eternal death.

So, the evidence of true Christian faith is *not* mere head knowledge of historical biblical facts, no matter how extensive that knowledge might be. Indeed, the Devil himself has such knowledge and that extensively. Yet he does not possess saving faith.

Nor is real evidence of true Christian faith dependent upon mere human emotions or the temporary unbridled expression thereof.

No, the evidence of true Christian faith is revealed in the daily God-pleasing conduct of the true Christian:

Firstly, As it manifests itself in many positive virtues, and  
Secondly, As it shows itself in the things that the true Christian avoids.

True Christians show their Christianity particularly in their relationship to the members of their own church.

In verse eight of our text, we are admonished to '*be of one mind*'.

Dear Ones, there is to be no division in the Christian congregation. We are to speak the same thing. We are to be agreed in all matters of Christian doctrine.

But how can this be?

Such an undertaking and success therein is possible only if we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, recognize and make diligent use of the *whole* truth of the Word of God as the only source and norm by which we live every aspect of our Christian lives.

For it is upon the One Foundation of the Christian faith, Christ Jesus being our Chief Cornerstone, whereby we are enabled to build a truly Christian congregation and so are held together by the bonds of true unity and harmony in Christ Jesus. Without faithfulness to the whole of God's Word, there can be no true unity, no real oneness of mind.

Furthermore, our text tells us, as true Christians we are to have compassion for each other, loving one another with brotherly love. For we are joined together, not simply by locale or some other earthly commonality, but we are joined together by the most perfect love of our Savior, who gave up His life for us, that we might have life, and have it more abundantly.

Therefore true Christians sincerely empathize with each other.

And not only when a brother or sister in the faith has need of compassion and sympathy on account of some misfortune which has befallen them, but we ought also to be ready to be truly empathetic when they have been all the more abundantly blessed. Indeed, we ought to whole-heartedly rejoice with them and join with them in giving sincere thanks and praise to our gracious and merciful God, from whom *all* blessings flow.

As we read in First Corinthians 12:26-27,

"...whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it."

And so it is fitting that each individual who desires to be called 'Christian' should examine himself.

Are we truly compassionate towards one another at all times?

Do we at all times manifest Christian love towards one another, willing to place our fellow Christian's needs and weaknesses before our own desires as brothers in the faith ought?

Let us sincerely repent of our fleshly backsliding, refocus our attention onto the Cross of Christ, and with the direction of the Holy Spirit, amend our sinful lives.

True Christian conduct also manifests itself in our relationship with non-Christians. The Apostle says, "Be pitiful."

Now St. Peter does not here mean that we are to be a people to be pitied, but rather that we are to be *full of pity* regarding anyone, including unbelievers, who may be in any distress.

Certainly we dare not forget that we have an obligation of true compassion over against the physical suffering of the world around us. To those who are in need of food, clothing, or shelter, let us give as though it were given to the Lord, for indeed our Lord tells us in Matthew 25:40: "*Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*"

And what greater spiritual distress or need is there than he who is suffering spiritual terrors over his sins because he does not yet know Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior? So, let us also be about spreading the Gospel message wherever and whenever the Lord presents us with an opportunity, remembering that we do all to the glory of God, who loved us so very much He sent His Only Begotten Son to suffer and die for us.

The true conduct of the Christian also shows itself in other ways.

The words of verse 11 and 12 of our text, "*let him eschew evil and do good; let him seek peace and ensue it.*" are a part of Psalm 34:12-16.

We are by nature sinful and therefore inclined only towards evil, but after we have received Christ crucified by faith, then as Christians, we do resist temptation to wrong-doing and daily fight a most terrible fight against all that is evil.

Daily through the Word, we must put to death our sinful flesh with all of its affections and evil lusts. Daily through the power of Christ Jesus, we strive to walk, not according to the dictates of the world and our sinful flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Anyone who wishes to live a life here on earth that is truly worth while; anyone who wishes to see days that are truly good, days that are truly beneficial, not vain and empty, but rather full of the fruit of righteousness, and the peace which truly surpasseth all human understanding, must do good and follow after peace, pursuing it with all Christian diligence.

Again, let us examine ourselves in the light of St. Peter's words.

How much real good do we do?

How often do we really exert ourselves in order to do that which is truly good?

And how often do we by sinful resentment towards our fellow Christians cause disturbance, strife, and contention, and in so doing inflict harm upon others and ourselves?

Let us repent and after the pattern of our Lord, let us rather serve one another in true humbleness, seeking only the good of our neighbor and fellow believers.

Yes, the children of this unbelieving world may hate us because we do not willingly join in their unbridled hedonism. They may denigrate us as fools for what they see as a prudish steadfast faithfulness to the whole truth of God's Word and they may even persecute us for our refusal to compromise the Word of God.

Now the natural reaction of sinful man to such treatment is to seek revenge. But the true Christian shows his Christianity, shows that he is a true child of God by putting down such thoughts, bringing his mind under subjection and avoiding the sin of revenge. For the man or woman who so tenaciously holds onto even simple *thoughts* of revenge over and against anyone, without ever actually carrying them out, is nothing less than manifestly impenitent and displays not the mark of true Christianity, but rather manifests the mark of the Evil One.

The true Christian will not willingly be guilty of cursing those who curse or otherwise abuse him either, but rather will again take for himself the example of his Lord Jesus and seek to follow in the steps of He, *"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."* (First Peter 2:22-23)

So the true Christian will strive to use the power of his tongue not in cursing, but for blessing those who so spitefully mistreat him, because he knows with the utmost joyful Christian confidence that his good and gracious Father in heaven watches over him and hears even the most simple of faithful prayers.

And if trouble from any quarter should find us on account of our God-pleasing life, on account of our righteousness in Christ Jesus, we know our good and gracious God will not allow any evil to befall us lest it serve our ultimate good.

*"For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

Yes, the entire world may be against us – and in fact Jesus tells us the World *is* the Christian's enemy – but we are the Lord's! And with our God standing as our Refuge and Strength for us, who shall ever successfully stand against us, or of whom shall we be afraid?

So then as Christians knowing what conduct is pleasing to our dear Lord and Savior, let us not follow the path of least resistance. Let us not be fearful of incurring the displeasure of this unbelieving world when we are called upon to stand up for what is Righteous and True. Neither let the terrors nor tribulations coming soon upon this world turn your focus from your Savior and the sure hope of everlasting life in heaven your Lord Jesus has gained for you.

As true Christians then, My Friends, recognize and avoid with all due diligence, the broad and easy highway upon which the unbelieving world runs headlong to its eternal destruction.

Let us rather endeavor by the aid of the Holy Spirit to live a life of true sanctification, living to serve Jesus Christ, our Savior King in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.  
Amen.

+++++

And now may the Peace of God, the Love of Christ and the Communion of the Holy Spirit keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.