



The Epistle of St.

A Newsletter for St. Paul's Lutheran Church

June 2006

Pleasant Pastures

Saving Obedience

Last month this column highlighted the text of the Athanasian Creed and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Near the end of that Creed, we confessed these words:

At [Christ's final] coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give an account of their own works. And they that have done good will go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

These strong words send a shiver up the spine of every conscientious person. For they make clear that what we do on earth matters.

What is more, this is not merely some human doctrine thought up by the ancient church fathers. It is rather, a thoroughly biblical teaching drawn almost word-for-word from the 25th chapter of Matthew.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer

them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did [it] not to one of the least of these, ye did [it] not to me. (vv. 41-45)

What the Law Demands

One of the striking features of this passage is that judgement is threatened not only against those who did evil works but upon those who did not do good works. In fact, evil works are not even mentioned here—only the lack of good.

You may go through your entire life without ever disobeying your parents, or getting a parking ticket. You may never hurt a soul or commit adultery. You may never steal a nickel or pass on a word of gossip and still be consigned to the pit of hell because you failed to feed a hungry mouth or visit an imprisoned soul. No wonder, then, that these words are so frightful.

They vividly remind us that God rightly expects not only the absence of evil but also the presence of good. And this is not some unreasonable expectation just to scare us. It is only right and just. After all, God has created us for a definite purpose.

If you were a potter who made a clay goblet, your reason for making that vessel is not only that it would never poison your drink, but also that it would actually hold your drink without leaking. Even if it never actually did anything to hurt you, still a leaking goblet would be discarded as worthless since it is not doing what it was made to do.

This is the same reality that we face when we do not do what God created us to do—namely good works. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” (Eph. 2:10)

The parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30) shows that the Master does not simply want us to keep safe what

He has given us but to use it to produce more. The man who didn't lose a single penny of his talent was called “wicked” (v. 26) because he didn't produce anything with it. As a result he was cast into “outer darkness” i.e. hell (v. 30).

Still we confess, “they that have done good will go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.” And yet, which of you can rightly say, “I have done good and never done evil”? So what hope do we have? Can anyone be saved?

Into this reality, Jesus comes with His salvation. The Gospel declares that there is salvation in Jesus Christ and only in Him. God promises to save you from His threatened destruction by grace, through faith in Jesus.

How can this be? How can God offer salvation after He has just made it so abundantly clear that you must have a complete absence of evil and have done your full share of good in order to be saved. Does God contradict Himself and take it all back? Does He say, “Don't worry about it, I was just kidding”? Certainly not. For He says, “I am the Lord, I change not.” (Mal. 3:6)

Jesus is the answer. In order for your salvation to be true and certain, Jesus must be for us the answer to both demands of the Law. Not only does Jesus take away your sins, He also does accomplish every good work that is required of you. If Jesus does not do both of these things, it would be impossible to confess that salvation is found in Jesus alone (Act 4:12) apart from the deeds of the law (Rom 3:28). By both being punished for your iniquities and by being perfectly obedient, Jesus is all in all.

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was

counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”
(Romans 4:2-6.)

This “imputed righteousness” is the full righteousness which is necessary for salvation.

The Person of Christ

Jesus is true God and true man. As such, he is not subject to the Law at all but is Himself the author of the Law. Nevertheless, Jesus voluntarily subjects Himself to the Law’s demands.

He is circumcised on the eighth day (Lk 2:21) submits to Mary and Joseph (Lk 2:49-51) submits to Pilate, Herod, Caiphas etc. Now why does He need to do this? *“I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”* (John 6:38). And, *“Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God”* Psalm 40:7-8.

Does He do it for Himself or for us? Clearly He does this for us. As He says in the sermon on the mount: *“I am not come to destroy but to fulfill the Law and the prophets”* (Mt 5:17). And Paul writes:

For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19).

This passage declares that Christ’s obedience makes us righteous. It embraces His entire life from conception to death. Since the 17th century, theologians have referred to two the two sides of Christ’s salvation as “passive obedience” (His suffering and death) and

“active obedience” (His life and good works.)

The Doctrine of Justification

This distinction is not found in the Bible so you might wonder why it is

You can never be sure if you have done enough good works—or done them well enough—or done them with clean enough motives—to be included in the company of those who are saved by faith.

It introduces a “monstrous uncertainty” that makes it impossible to firmly believe that you have indeed been saved by grace for Christ’s sake. And, apart from such faith, you cannot be saved.

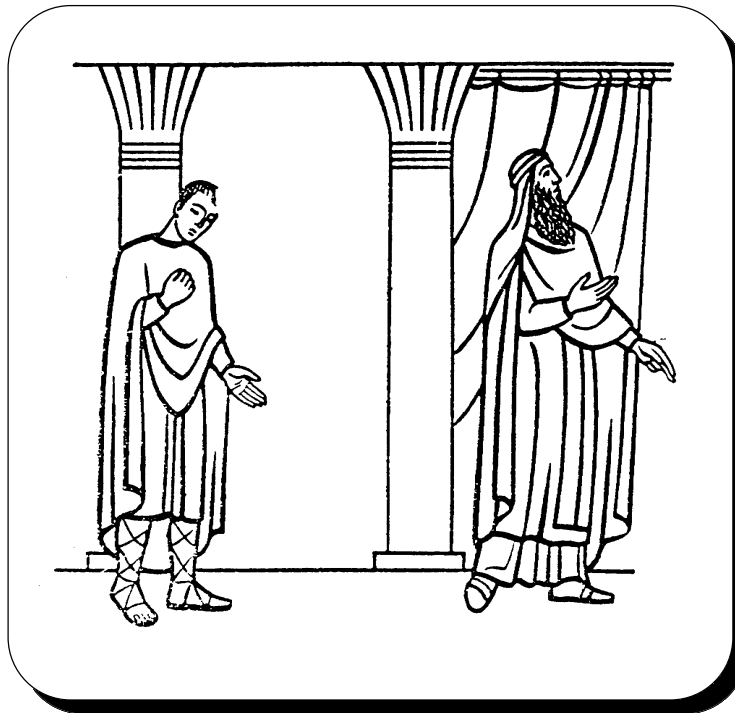
In addition to the problems that this causes for faith, it also diminishes Christ and makes His life and work the major part—but not the only part of my salvation. It teaches a sinner to look to himself for salvation and to take his eyes off of “Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2)

In these three sections I have briefly outlined the important, biblical doctrine that Christ’s obedience counts for us. It can be summarized in three sentences. 1) For salvation, the whole Law must be fulfilled—not just part of it. 2) Christ as God does not need to obey the Father for His own sake but, nevertheless, He obeys Him for our sake. 3) Faith in Christ is only possible if Christ is the entire reason for our justification and not merely a part of it.

And so, the Law’s demands remain true — they cannot be skirted. But now by faith, Christ’s works becomes your own works. Christ’s righteousness is truly and really accounted to you. In Christ—and only in Christ—you will rise bodily to go into life everlasting. And all those outside of Christ who stand before God to give account of their own works and merits must go into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith which, except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.

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important at all. The answer is that even though the Bible doesn’t make the distinction or cut up Jesus’ work into active and passive obedience, false teachers began doing just that.

Already in Luther’s day, before the terminology was invented, some people were teaching that we are saved by “faith formed by love” (*fides caritate formata*). This teaching holds that Christ’s takes away our sins by His suffering and death but we are not yet saved by this. Rather, this removal of sins puts us in the position to begin adding our own works of love (good works) and that this combination of faith and love is the reason for our salvation.

Of course, it is true that true faith will always lead to good works. However, it is a mortal error (a faith-killing mistake) to conclude that these good works are a partial cause of our salvation.

For if it is taught that a person can only be saved if he has personally done good works in addition to having his evil works forgiven, the result is this:

Pastoral Pedagogy

Why Not Sin Then?

The full and free gift of salvation which comes through Jesus by grace, through faith can easily lead the rational mind to conclude: “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*” Romans 6:1.

To this, God answers a firm, “*By no means!*” (v. 2) Why would anyone want to return to the prison from which you were just freed? Furthermore, there remains a grave danger that the willful continuation in sin will destroy in you that saving faith which is God’s precious creation in you through the Word.

Martin Chemnitz, one of the leading teachers of Lutheranism does an excellent job of explaining why these are called “mortal sins.” From here to the end of this column, is his discussion.

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Now, then, since it is clear that no sin per se deserves forgiveness, likewise that no sin is so horrible that it cannot be forgiven to those who repent and believe in Christ—why, then, are some sins in the reborn called venial, some mortal?

This should be well and carefully explained, so that each Christian can know and determine if he is living in mortal or venial sin. The explanation consists essentially in this, that everyone examine himself as to whether or not he has true repentance and faith. Rom. 2:4—5; Jer 5:3; 2 Cor. 13:5.

Original sin, which still dwells in the flesh of the reborn, is not idle, but is the restless law of sin in our members, enticing, tempting, driving to sin with various suggestions and evil lusts. James 1:14; Rom. 7:8; Gal. 5:17.

Since, then, one who is reborn does not delight in this kind of carnal lusts, and is neither led by them nor follows them, but earnestly represses and crucifies them as sins and mortifies them through the Spirit, lest they rule or be performed (Rom. 6:12; 7:15; 8:13; Gal. 5:24), this very thing is a very

sure sign of true and earnest repentance.

And when the reborn pray that God would not impute these weaknesses to them but forgive for the sake of Christ, and at the same time believe and trust that Christ, as the true propitiation, would, in the sight of God, cover this their uncleanness with His innocence and obedience (Rom. 4:7; Ps. 32:1; 1 John 1:7; 2:1-2), this also is a sure sign of true and justifying faith.

And where true faith, in earnest repentance, apprehends Christ in the Gospel, and relies on Him and is supported by Him, there is no condemnation, but the pure grace of God, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation (Rom. 8:1; 1 John 1:9; Ps. 32:2). In this way there are and occur these venial sins in the reborn, for which they are not condemned, because, as Augustine says, they live under grace.

But what if we indulge and delight in evil lusts and seek occasions to give them free rein (Rom. 6:12; Mic. 2:1; James 1:15)?

Then they become mortal sins (Rom. 8:13; James 1:15), because there surely is no room for true repentance and faith where the lusts of the flesh are served and given rein, so that they break out into action. I Tim. 1:19; 5:8; 2 Peter 1:9.

It is the nature and particular character of true faith that it does not seek how to commit, continue, and heap up sins freely, but rather hungers and thirsts after the righteousness that releases and frees from sins. Therefore, where there is no true repentance, the Holy Spirit pronounces a very solemn sentence. Jer. 5:3,9; Rom. 2:5,9; Luke 13:3; Rev. 2:5.

And where there is no true faith, there is neither Christ, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the grace of God, nor forgiveness of sins, nor any salvation. Therefore what? Doubtless the wrath of God, death, and eternal condemnation,

unless the fallen are turned to God again. Col. 3:6; Rom. 8:13. As a result of this, therefore, and for this reason mortal sins occur in the reborn, namely when repentance, faith, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are driven out and lost.

How, then, should one deal with those who have fallen into this kind of sins?

Their sins are not to be disguised by silence, camouflaged, excused, or defended, but solemnly and earnestly censured and rebuked. Is. 56:10; 58:1; Eze. 13:10,18; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:13: “Reprove them sharply,” in such a way that the fearful judgment of God is threatened on them; I Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:21; Col. 3:6; 1 John 3:15; Matt. 11:21; 2 Peter 2:10.

For he that regards those people as true Christians, and charms and misrepresents them, not only miserably misleads them, but also makes himself partaker of their damnation. Is. 3:12; Jer. 8:11; 23:17; Ezek. 3:18; 33:8.

Now, the preaching of repentance, rebuking sins, is the instrument and means by which God wants to lead fallen sinners back to the way and convert them. Jer. 26:2-3. But if the wicked, neglecting this means, will persevere and continue in his wickedness, he indeed shall perish, but the word of the minister shall deliver his soul. Ezek. 3:19.

But what if the fallen rise again by the grace of God and earnestly repent?

Then they are indeed to be received with joy and are to be restored and supported with the declaration of the forgiveness of sins. Jer. 3:12; 18:8; Ezek. 18:21; 33:15; Matt. 18:13, 27; Luke 15:7. This is what the examples of Scripture testify, e.g., Peter, David, the prodigal, the Corinthians and Galatians. And this indeed not only seven times, but seventy times seven times, Matt. 18:22.

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Parish Periscope

Pending Pericopes

♦ Bible Study Opportunities

We continue to feature a Bible Study opportunity each Wednesday at 9:30AM. We are working through the Gospel according to St. John (7th chapter). The Bible text works as our spring-board into a variety of topics concerning God and religion.

Sunday morning Bible Study meets before the *Divine Service* at 8:00AM. We continue to read through and discuss the Lutheran Book of Concord.

♦ Planning Ahead for 2007

Due to the overwhelming response to this summer's Youth Conference, Higher Things will be offering two different Conferences next summer. One in Minneapolis, MN (July 24-27) and the other in Asheville, NC (July 31-Aug. 3). If you are interested in either of these conferences, please speak with Pastor Lange as soon as possible so that they don't fill up before we can register.

♦ Youth Group

We are looking for a volunteer to coordinate youth activities for the congregation. Shepherd of the Valley in Fort Bridger has invited us to join with their youth for joint activities, Bible studies and fellowship. If you would be interested in helping out in this way, please contact Pastor Lange.

♦ Congregational Web Site

www.lutheransonline.com/StPaulsKemmerer

If you would like to be among the first to receive your monthly newsletter and save a stamp in the process, please email me at JLange64@allwest.net and I would be happy to send you the monthly newsletter and calendar to your email inbox as a PDF attachment. Also, if you would like to forward this letter to a friend, you can direct them to our website where these PDF files are always available.

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The Divine Service leads us through the year according to the lectionary series in place since the 7th century. Below are the upcoming readings for the Sundays and Festivals of the month. You may wish to study them ahead of time as additional preparation for the service.

♦ Trinity 3–July 2

Psalm: 103
Old Testament: Micah 7:18-20
Epistle: 1 Peter 5:6-11
Gospel: St. Luke 15:1-32

♦ Trinity 4–July 9

Psalm: 138
Old Testament: Genesis 50:15-21
Epistle: Romans 8:18-23
Gospel: St. Luke 6:36-42

♦ Trinity 5–July 16

Psalm: 147
Old Testament: I Kings 19:11-21
Epistle: 1 Peter 8:8-15
Gospel: St. Luke 5:1-11

♦ Trinity 6–July 23

Psalm: 90
Old Testament: Exodus 20:1-17
Epistle: Romans 6:1-11
Gospel: St. Matthew 5:17-26

♦ Trinity 7–July 30

Psalm: 34
Old Testament: Genesis 2:7-17
Epistle: Romans 6:19-23
Gospel: St. Mark 8:1-9

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