

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sixth Sunday after Epiphany–Septuagesima, February 16, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 416, 278: 1, 421, 398, 409.

Lessons: Genesis 2: 18-24, Philippians 3: 10-21, Matthew 22: 34-40.

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 4: 1-8.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Word of God is very specific when it comes to telling us about the law of God. Today I want to remind you of the sixth commandment. Surely you remember “**THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT. You shall not commit adultery.** *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we lead a pure and decent life in words and actions, and that husband and wife love and honor each other.”

The State of Minnesota last spring legalized homosexual marriage, something which God condemns as sin. The United States Supreme Court has approved of homosexual marriage. And we can expect more approval and toleration of this abomination in God’s sight.

But today let us be reminded of

GOD’S WILL FOR HOLY LIVING

- 1. God’s children live to please God, not themselves.**
- 2. God’s will for sex and marriage.**
- 3. God called us to live a holy life.**

After giving thanks for their faith, in this chapter Saint Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians “*finally*”. Here is the Sanctification part of his letter to them. We speak of the two chief doctrines of the Bible: as law and gospel. Sometimes orthodox Lutheran theologians have added a third, a very important teaching that grows out of the first two: Sanctification. The Law shows all men their sins. The Gospel shows the Savior from all sins. Sanctification could be called the application of Law and Gospel to our lives. From Scripture we learn that Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. The Bible uses this word Sanctification in two different ways. One means to call someone out of the unbelieving world to be holy by bringing that person to faith in Christ, enlightening him and keeping him in the faith. We call this Sanctification in the wider sense. The word also means “to lead a believer to hate sin and be eager to live a holy life filled with good works.” This is Sanctification in the narrow sense. It makes Sanctification a very personal thing, applying it to me.

Saint Paul is not telling them anything he or other Christian teachers had not already taught them. He says that you were taught “*how to live in order to please God.*” That is the goal of every Christian every day. We must drown our sinful flesh every day “*in order to please God.*”

He commends them by saying “*as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.*” He says again in the next verse: “*For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*” It wasn’t just human teaching, but teachings Paul received by the authority of Jesus. And this sermon, too, strives to teach only what the Word of God teaches!

You may not be a stranger to God’s will telling how he wants man to live. That will is summarized in the ten commandments. Paul is talking first of all to those who have learned God’s will. He is not talking to out-and-out pagans who don’t know anything about right and wrong. But haven’t you, too, encountered people, even those who are members of some church, who really don’t know right from wrong?

God through Paul here is asking and urging people to live in the Lord Jesus. He is also admonishing us, since we fall into sin daily and much. He is not asking them to do anything they have not learned, since he

reminds them that he gave them instructions ***“by the authority of the Lord Jesus.”*** This isn’t just Paul talking, but God talking through Paul.

Next he tells them to live ***“as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.”*** Yes, you are doing this, but you need to do it more and more. I think that just like the Christians in Thessalonica, many of you must work in places where there is unbridled immorality, and people talk about their sinful lives freely and repeatedly. They boast of their sinfulness in one way or another even to you, unless you have made it clear by your confession that you don’t want to hear about it. And you know from what they say that they are not living as Christians. They either just don’t know the will of God, or if they do know what God says, they find ways of ignoring it or pretending that it doesn’t apply to their lives. If you don’t personally work in such a situation, you should ask your children about how “the kids at school” talk and behave. You may get an earful about how immoral even children are. The hymn-writer tells us “The world is very evil”. It is getting more evil as judgment day swiftly approaches. We must all realize that we are not living “in your father’s world” of thirty or forty years ago. The openness of all kinds of immorality and wickedness really should shock us. But we have been so accustomed to having it around us that even we, God’s children, take it for granted. Even we at times no longer recognize sin as sin. There are many very active campaigns by the world to tolerate and approve of sin and immorality. We often no longer think about or remember that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. We forget or are encouraged by the world to set aside God’s teaching: ***“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”*** (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Christians have often become like that frog who found a nice pan of warm water to sit in. At first it was really quite a comfortable body of warm water. It was getting a little warmer, but that was just fine. It only seemed more comfortable, a good place to be. But all of a sudden the pan was boiling water, and it was too late to jump out. Paul says “you know what I told you.”

Then he speaks of sexual immorality. ***“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.”*** He doesn’t go into extensive detail. He says just enough about sexual immorality to make God’s will unmistakable. We remember the sixth commandment and Luther’s explanation. We read in Hebrews 13:4: ***“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”*** Paul approaches this subject here bluntly yet delicately. He after all is the one who wrote to the Ephesians: ***“For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”*** (Ephesians 5:12) We don’t have to know the details of the immorality of the world.

But it is all around us, and unfortunately the displays of it and of people boasting about it find its way into our homes. What is presented as entertainment now? Movies and television programs have “ratings”, and more and more television programs have warnings about “parental discretion advised”, or even “discretion advised” – a warning for adults! Why do we have to be entertained by such things as “adult” and “R” rated and “PG” rated things? There are many opportunities every day – if your children watch any television at all – to exercise “Parental Guidance”. Parents are to raise their children ***“in the training and instruction of the Lord.”*** (Ephesians 6:4) That means that you are to guide your children and to teach them what God says! We sometimes even invite the wickedness of the world into our homes. When is the last time you turned off the television because of the wickedness that was portrayed? When is the last time you walked out of a movie theatre – or didn’t even plan to go into a movie theatre – because of the wickedness that was portrayed? There are many in the world who know the power of a boycott – just not buying what is offered! We too could speak out, not only with our voices but with our purchasing power! We are in the world but we do not have to be “of the world”. God speaks to Christians when he says in Romans 12:2: ***“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.”***

If you have children in school, I think you know that your children are receiving what is called sex education, or “family education”. But what they are learning isn’t always what God tells us in his word. The word “abstinence” – that means “Thou Shalt Not...”, “You Shall Not...” – may not even be an essential part of that curriculum. I suspect that you may have even heard back in 2006 – eight years ago! – of a public school board voting to supply birth control even to middle school children in an eastern state! And because so much in the world is so explicit and detailed, the catechism we are now using is more explicit than the catechism that most of you used. I hope that parents are working through the catechism with their children. This allows you to know what they are learning, and is a great review of the scriptural truths you learned, perhaps having learned it as children yourself.

God’s sixth commandment is the solution to many of mankind’s problems: “Thou Shalt Not”. “You Shall Not”. That would have solved HIV/AIDS and all sexually transmitted diseases if all people had obeyed God. It would stop the spread of them if everyone followed God’s command and precept: God’s way for sexual activity is a marriage of one man and one woman for a lifetime!

The concept of “Self-Control” is found here in Scripture. That is something that doesn’t seem to be taught by the world in any area of life any more. God urges and commands ***“that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God.”*** God says especially ***“that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.”*** Even our local newspaper has reports of accusations and even trials where someone has taken advantage of another – especially of someone younger.

“The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.” There again is a necessary reminder that the Lord will punish men for all such sins. That includes earthly punishments, yes – such as incurable and even fatal sexually transmitted diseases. But the world gives a bad example and even teaches “take your chances; it’s not likely you will be caught with such a disease”. Or the world teaches “here is a way to avoid such diseases”. But no such human preventatives are foolproof. And then, even more horrible, there is the eternal punishment God speaks of.

God in Romans 1 speaks of punishment related to sexual immorality. We can easily recognize that with the spread of HIV/AIDS we see the fulfillment even on earth of Romans 1:26-27: ***“Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.”*** And there is finally eternal judgment – punishment in hell for the very sins Jesus Christ atoned for! If only humans will repent and turn to Jesus and then live as Jesus’ children, live sanctified lives!

“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” Right there is God’s clear reminder for every area of our lives. We admit we are sinners, but that dare never be an excuse for sinning. We believe that Jesus lived a perfect life to redeem us from our sins, and then he was punished for sinning in our place! We, then, as God’s children have the high calling to ***“live a holy life.”*** That’s your mission in life, not just an ideal, or a nice goal. Remember 1 Corinthians 6:11: ***“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*** That involves a holy life in thought, word, and action. May God the Holy Ghost guide us each moment of each day to ***“live a holy life!”*** Amen.