

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, September 27, 2015

✠ ✠ ✠

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

Hymns: 289, 196:1, 295, 297, 324:7-8.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 22:1-4, Galatians 3:19-27, Matthew 12:1-12.

Sermon Text: Luke 14: -6.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

From time to time Jesus was invited to dine at homes of Pharisees. Scripture says this was ***“a prominent Pharisee,”*** a leader of the Pharisees.

There was also a severely ill man there, with a disease called dropsy. Dropsy is a disease which causes an abnormal accumulation of fluids in connective tissues and cavities of the body with symptoms of swelling and poor circulation. It is usually a sign of more serious medical problems. Before helping this diseased man Jesus asks a question of ***“the Pharisees and experts in the law”*** who were present at the meal. He knew that among the human laws and law-books that had been added to God’s Word, there were differences of opinions, and they were just that. Opinions.

Jesus ***“was being carefully watched.”*** The ***“Pharisees and experts in the law”*** were among those who sought to discredit him and so when he asked them questions, they would answer carefully or not at all. Today they do not answer him at all. So Jesus ends up teaching a lesson about

“LAWS” AND THE GOSPEL

- 1. God’s laws are clear.**
- 2. It becomes confusing when men add laws to – or subtract from – God’s laws.**
- 3. But the Word of God is clear.**

Jesus’ questions were questions about law – specifically God’s laws. For Jews in Jesus’ day, God’s laws had been obscured by all the man-made laws from the ***“the experts in the law,”*** some of whom were gathered with him.

Remember the three purposes or uses of the law of God: a curb for all men, a mirror for all men, and a guide for the Christian. We learn about these three purposes or uses of the Law from Scripture: As a curb it prevents – to some extent – coarse outbreaks of sin. People obey laws, including God’s Law, because they fear punishment. As a mirror it shows people their sinfulness. As a guide for the believer, it shows us what God wants us to do. The believer in Jesus as Savior is one who then wants to do what God commands.

In our epistle lesson you heard that ***“the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”*** (Galatians 3:23-25 NIV) If you are familiar with the King James Version, you remember hearing that ***“the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”*** (Galatians 3:24-25 KJV)

That picture of the Law as our schoolmaster, as being ***“put in charge”*** is the picture of a servant for children of Greek nobility who saw to it that the child learned what he should learn and got to the appointments he had to make, especially with his teachers. The goal and the purpose of the law of God was to point us toward and to bring us to Christ, who could – and did – save us from the punishment of God’s Law. Jesus himself tells us ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to***

abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17 NIV) Paul writes about the Law of God in this way: ***"These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."*** (Colossians 2:17 NIV)

Obedying God's Law – all of it – does not save us. It does not earn our way into heaven, because we cannot obey it perfectly. Leviticus and Deuteronomy make that clear: ***"You must be blameless before the LORD your God."*** (Deuteronomy 18:13 NIV) ***"Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy."*** (Leviticus 19:2 KJV)

But we can't. No human can, except Jesus Christ. We read in the Bible that ***"the law made nothing perfect."*** (Hebrews 7:19 NIV) We were ***"dead in trespasses and sins:"*** (Ephesians 2:1 KJV)

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:4-9)

Behind Jesus' question we see the law of God as mirror. Could these men, scholars of the Old Testament, have been confused about what God really said? The Jews had come up with so many interpretations and explanations and exceptions and work-arounds to avoid doing what God said that there is good reason they could or should be confused.

However, God's laws are clear. He doesn't say, for example, "You shall have no other gods except when it suits you, or except when 'everyone else' has the possessions you want, or when your heart is set on doing something that God forbids." He says ***"You shall have no other gods."*** Period.

He doesn't say, for example, "You shall not steal except when everyone else seems to be cheating or stealing or except when it is something little, or except when you think you really have to take something you want or even think you need." He says ***"You shall not steal."*** Period.

He doesn't say, as in the ninth and tenth commandments "You shall not covet except when no one else knows what is in your heart or except when it is just a little thing you really, really want, or except when someone else is getting praise you think you deserve." He says ***"You shall not covet ... any-thing."***

We could go through all Ten Commandments like this, but I invite you to dig out your catechism and do it for yourself.

Remember, the Law is a mirror to show us our sinfulness. We read in Romans: ***"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."*** (Romans 3:20 NIV)

Is it any wonder even today that people are confused about what God really says in his Word?

Churches and teachers in the church come up with all sorts of exceptions and reasons for setting aside the plain, clear Word of God.

I personally wonder how it is that some churches can even teach "the Ten Commandments" when they make so many exceptions to them. For example, there are church-wide decrees that approve of abortion and homosexuality. Those directly contradict the Fifth Commandment and the Sixth Commandment.

It is even worse today than the "situation ethics" that were so horrifying when they were widely publicized in the 1960s. What that means is that a spiritual leader would say 'well, yes, God does say what you are doing is a sin. But in your situation, it is OK and right, because your circumstances, your situation, make it hard or impossible for you to do what God commands."

And I'm not just talking about church-wide decrees, but differences among priests, pastors, and congregations.

Then there are people who totally flaunt, who completely disregard God's laws, even among our neighbors, acquaintances and friends!

God is very clear when he says ***"Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you."*** (Deuteronomy 4:2 NIV) God is very clear when he warns us not to twist or change his Word. ***"They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."*** (Jude 1:4 NIV)

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law – the “scribes” – remained silent. They couldn’t answer without tripping on some man-made laws or personal opinions or even things they had done **“on the Sabbath”**.

What does Jesus do? **“So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.”**

“The Pharisees and experts in the law”, hypocrites that they were forgot that works of love were indeed certainly permitted on the Sabbath-day, even according to the strictest Mosaic law. In this way Jesus fulfilled the greatest commandment: **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Matthew 22:39 NIV)

We can imagine their attitude was like that of the Pharisees as recorded in the previous chapter of Luke’s Gospel. Jesus had healed a crippled woman right in a synagogue! The synagogue ruler was **“Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, [and] said to the people, ‘There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.’ The Lord answered him, ‘You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?’** (Luke 13:14-15 NIV)

After the question and their lack of an answer in our text Jesus healed the man **“and sent him away.”** Jesus asks the second question, which points to the Gospel. **“If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?”** This is a reflection of the deed mentioned in Deuteronomy 22:4: **“If you see your brother’s donkey or his ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it. Help him get it to its feet.”** If they were to take care of their animals so carefully, what should they do about their children, or another human being?

Won’t you **“pull him out?”** Isn’t that exactly what God has done for you? Isn’t that precisely what God has done for sinful mankind? Pulled us out of the road to eternal damnation? Yes, God has rescued us from sin, and death, and the power of the devil. God did this for us by sending a substitute for us. This substitute obeyed the Law of God perfectly in our place. Then he suffered hell in our place. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16 NIV)

Our substitute is Jesus Christ, who obeyed all of God’s Laws perfectly in our place – for us. That fulfilled the perfection God demands of all men, and God then clothed us with this perfection of Jesus. To complete our salvation, God then punished his son, Jesus Christ, for all the sins of all mankind, in this way atoning for all sins of all mankind.

That is Gospel, real Gospel.

So these **“Pharisees and experts in the law”** could not answer Jesus. They really had nothing to say in their defense. Previously they had chosen not to answer Jesus. Now it is plain they have no excuse. They could not reply. They were speechless. They didn’t understand the real purpose of God’s Law.

Jesus, however, surely understood the Gospel and what he came to earth to do.

You know and understand what Jesus came to do. He did not come to give more laws but to set men free – eternally – from the punishment of breaking God’s laws. We have been pulled out of the damnation of hell so that we may serve God willingly and freely. In the same way that we continue to learn from God’s Law, let us never forget the message of the Gospel! Amen.