

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, February 5, 2017

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

Hymns: 224, 226:1-2, 233, 236, 644.

Lessons: 2 Chronicles 15:1-15, Romans 8:7-17, Matthew 3:13-17.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How does one become a child of God? Do we decide to become believers in Christ? Do we decide to become Christians? Our sermon today should make it clear that no one decides to become a Christian. It is a force outside us that led us to Jesus Christ as our Savior from all our sins.

Every one of us, every human being must recognize that we are not by nature sinless. God's law makes that clear, and the result of that is we – ***“the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God.”***

But is there any hope? Those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ and those who have not yet come to Jesus Christ in faith must recognize that we owe a great deal – we owe our lives, our eternal lives to the work of the Holy Spirit, for

THE WORK OF THE HOLY GHOST IS SANCTIFICATION

- 1. How has the Holy Ghost made you God's child?**
- 2. He has called you by the Gospel and enlightened you with his gifts.**
- 3. He continues his work of sanctification when and where the Gospel is heard.**

Paul is very blunt and plain in his language: ***“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. And that is what some of you were. 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.”***

Whoa, pastor, wait a minute. Are you talking about me? I may not be perfect but am not sexually immoral – unless you are thinking of the times I have lusted in my heart after someone I am not married to. A thief? No. Well, there was that time when I took a candy bar that belonged to someone else. Greedy? Well, I want things I don't have and think about how to get them. Ok. I might be greedy. And when have I ever been falling down drunk? Slanderer? Maybe I say things that aren't so kind sometimes. Swindler? I am not a Bernie Madoff or any of those rich people who got caught taking other people's money.

Yet I suppose that God looks at me and realizes I am not the sinless, good person I want to be or sometimes pretend I am. Yes, I guess Paul is right when he talks about me and says ***“that is what some of you were.”*** But pastor, I also hear you say ***“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.”***

Yes, by the grace of God I have been, you have been sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. And how does that happen? ***“By the Spirit of our God.”*** That is the work of the Holy Ghost. Scripture tells us that his work is “sanctification”. Its simplest definition is “to make holy”. He does this by bringing me to faith in Christ and by giving to me the blessings of redemption. Sanctification in the wider sense includes everything that the Holy Ghost does in me. Sanctification in the narrower sense, a personal, subjective sense, means leading a believer to hate sin and be eager to live a holy life filled with good works.

We confess in the Creed that “the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Today let’s look at those words for a few minutes and realize what the Holy Ghost has done for me and how he does that.

The Holy Ghost leads a lost sinner to salvation. He calls us by the Gospel, converts us to faith, justifies us through faith, sanctifies us in this faith, preserves us in the faith and finally saves us by faith.

When we say that the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, we mean that he has invited me to partake of Christ's blessings, which are offered to me in the Gospel. God **“has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”** 2 Timothy 1:9 (NIV) This work is done by the Gospel of Jesus Christ found in the Word of God. **“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”** Romans 10:17 (KJV)

By the Law of God the Holy Ghost has led us to a realization of our lost condition. Then he calls us by the Gospel. He does this by having the Gospel preached to us. He invites us to come to Christ. Jesus says: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** Matthew 11:28 (NIV) He offers grace and forgiveness to us. The Gospel call is never an empty and powerless word, but the blessings it offers are contained in the very words of its promise. Because of that, the Gospel possesses the power to draw our hearts to Christ.

By the Gospel the Holy Ghost enlightened me with his gifts, that is, he gave me the saving knowledge of Jesus, my Savior, so that I trust and believe, rejoice and take comfort, in him. Scripture assures us that **“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”** 2 Corinthians 4:6 (NIV) Men sometimes reject the Gospel call, and thus make it impossible for the Holy Ghost to continue his work. Wherever the Gospel call is effective, the Holy Ghost "enlightens us with his gifts". To "enlighten" someone means to “turn on the light”, to make a dark matter clear to him, to give him a right understanding and evaluation of what he has learned. To natural man the "things of the Spirit" are "foolishness". **“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”** 1 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV) The Holy Ghost works in his heart a true appreciation of them so that he now sees them spiritually, and thus they become precious wisdom to him. The intellectual knowledge of the mind now becomes a spiritual knowledge of the heart. He not only knows these things, but he believes and trusts in them; he has faith. Thus it is that the Holy Ghost called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. By means of the Gospel he shined into our dark and despairing hearts and gave **“us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”** 2 Corinthians 4:6 (NIV)

And so the "gifts" with which we are enlightened include faith. Such faith may be small and weak at first, just like a flickering wick of a weak candle, but as God continues to enlighten us through the Gospel, this faith-knowledge grows and becomes stronger and increases as a gift of God.

Such faith instantly changes our entire attitude toward God. We are no longer afraid of him, but we love him; we are no longer dead to him, but our hearts are alive with trust in him; we are no longer his enemies, but know ourselves to be his dear children. We rejoice in him who has saved us from eternal damnation in hell. We find comfort and peace in him against the accusations of our own conscience and of the devil, and we cherish in our hearts a glorious hope.

The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing someone to faith is called conversion, and regeneration or being born again, and quickening. This is not something man can do by himself. He cannot decide to come to Christ. He is passive, not active in his conversion. Scripture plainly speaks of conversion, of turning to God, in this way: **“turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.”** Jeremiah 31:18 (KJV) Just as no one can choose to be born, Jesus tells us: **“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”** John 3:5-6 (NIV) The Holy Ghost turned us from sin towards our Savior. He has given us a new attitude toward God. A new spiritual life was born in us. **“We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) We have become "a new creature". All these are figurative expressions, which in plain words mean that the Holy Ghost has worked faith in our hearts.

There is never a middle ground between being converted and not being converted. A person is either spiritually alive or spiritually dead, either a believer or an unbeliever, either a child of God or a slave of the devil. Jesus said ***“He who is not with me is against me.”*** Luke 11:23 (NIV)

We may not remember the day and hour when we were converted, nor is this necessary, but Scripture says ***“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.”*** 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV) so that we can say with Paul: ***“I know whom I have believed.”*** 2 Timothy 1:12 (NIV)

By such conversion we stand in the grace of God. Waking or sleeping we continue in God’s grace as long as we continue in the faith. By conversion we also became the temple of God, and members of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. The initial renewal of the image of God takes place in us, and we are made children of God and heirs of eternal salvation.

Though by nature man is an enemy of God, and does not want to come to him, yet God does not force conversion on him. But by the Gospel God persuades man, and influences his will so that he is turned toward God. ***“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*** Philippians 2:13 (NIV) If man resists this influence, then the cause of this resistance lies solely in man, and it is his own fault if he is lost. On the other hand, if the influence of God prevails, and man turns to God in faith, then the cause for his conversion lies solely in the power of God's grace.

In addition, the Holy Ghost has sanctified me in the true faith, that is, he has by faith in Christ renewed my heart, so that I can now overcome sin and do good works. This is Sanctification in the narrower sense.

The very moment faith springs up in the heart it clings to God's promise of grace and forgiveness, and grasps what this promise offers. Thus the believer does not have to wait some time before he receives forgiveness for his sins, but he has it immediately, the moment he believes.

The wicked life of natural man has its source in the heart, and any reformation of his life must also begin there. Laws, rules and regulations may somewhat change the outward conduct of man, but it is the sanctifying power of faith that truly reforms the sinner. Before his conversion man is carnally minded, he seeks to please himself and to gratify his desires and lusts; but when he learns to know and to appreciate the grace of God, his heart is filled with love and gratitude toward God, he is now spiritually minded. He desires to please God.

Such a change of heart will inevitably show itself in a change of life. The believer will suppress the wicked promptings of his flesh; and will resist temptation and the devil.

This change of heart will also show itself in a positive way by doing good works. Faith will always bring forth the fruit of good works. Good works is one of the purposes for which Christ redeemed us and for which the Holy Ghost converted us. So we should not only think of the final salvation God offers through faith, but because of the great mercies received we should even now dedicate ourselves to the service of God, living before him in righteousness and holiness. This is what God expects of his children.

Sanctification begins the moment faith springs up in the heart, for faith is the root and fountain of it, and it continues as long as we have faith. It varies according to the strength and the weakness of faith, but if our faith fails to have an influence on our lives, then it is dead. Because of our old Adam the sanctification of our lives will never be perfect on earth, but we must constantly strive to grow in holiness and good works. And in this we need the assistance of the Holy Ghost, who helps us through the Gospel. It is he who sanctifies us through faith. But we must never think that the holy life we live and the good works we do will save us. They are merely an expression of our gratitude to God for having saved us by his grace in Christ Jesus.

What the Holy Ghost has done and is doing for me, he has done and is doing for many others, for the whole Christian Church, whom he has brought to Christ and keeps with Christ in the one true faith. The external circumstances attending the conversion of individuals may differ. Paul came to Christ on his way to Damascus; I was brought to Jesus in Baptism. Yet it is the same Spirit of God that works in all, and he uses the same means of grace, follows the same method of grace, works the same faith and spiritual life in all. The way of salvation is the same for all, for children and adults, for the learned and the unlearned, and whoever tries to get to heaven by another way will not get there. Thanks be to God, who has called us to faith, sanctifies us, and keeps us in faith! Amen.