

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fourth Sunday after Trinity, July 1, 2012

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

Hymns: 381, 412:1, 409, 398, 416.

Lessons: Genesis 6:1-9, Romans 5:1-11, Matthew 5:38-48.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Quick: Do you remember the difference between justification and sanctification? Which comes first?

The glossary in the back of our catechism defines justification as “God’s declaration that people are not guilty because Jesus has paid for their sins.” To justify means “to declare not guilty.”

That same glossary defines sanctification as “the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace”, and defines the word sanctify as “to make holy, used in two different ways in the Bible: 1. 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 (sanctify in the wider sense); [and] 2. To lead a believer to hate sin and be eager to live a holy life filled with good works (sanctify in the narrow sense).”

So you see that justification, the fact of God declaring mankind not guilty of their sins must come first, before sanctification. Even if you look at the Lutheran Hymnal on page 837 near the end you will see that justification hymns are listed first, then “Sanctification (The Christian Life)”, with such groupings under Sanctification as “Consecration”, “New Obedience”, Trust”, “Stewardship” and “Christian Warfare”.

Peter begins our text with the word *“therefore”*. This is a conclusion to what he had written previously: God has blessed us and is watching over us.

God has declared mankind not guilty. The Holy Ghost has given this justification into the hearts of those who believe, calling them to sanctification.

Peter writes to Christians who are foreigners, strangers in this world, but they have been called by God to live their lives for him. So Peter’s letter goes on giving

ENCOURAGEMENT TO LIVE GOD-PLEASING LIVES

- 1. As obedient children, be self-controlled; be holy for your Father is holy.**
- 2. You were redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.**
- 3. Because you have been redeemed, love one another deeply.**
- 4. Rid yourselves of wickedness and crave God’s spiritual milk.**

“Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Holy living is not optional for Christians. Christians are called to be holy above all else because God is holy.

We cannot save ourselves. Yes, we confess that we are “poor miserable sinners”. But Christians who have been regenerated by the power of the Spirit can make moral choices. When the Holy Spirit’s knowledge and power have been given to us, our willpower is reborn and we are enabled to choose good things. Washed by the water of baptism, and inspired and guided by the Word of God, we can indeed act and live as obedient children. We can indeed be self-controlled. Believers are no longer slaves to sin, even though they must fight sin every moment of every day.

Peter tells us to place your hope totally on the return of Christ and its results. Don’t rely on anything in this world. Your hope is to be in what Jesus Christ will bring. That is because you have received the grace of God, his undeserved love in your lives.

We hope fully, “totally” by “getting your minds ready for work” and being “well-balanced” – self-controlled. This is a mental resolve and preparation. The King James Version uses the words *“be sober”*. The

cares of this life and pressure of persecution can ‘intoxicate’ the Christian and distract his or her focus just as easily as wine might. We need clear judgment and a clear mind and will which is prepared to resist anything that would distract or deflect us from a hope set on Jesus’ reappearing.

Peter says to prepare your minds. You always prepare for things, or if you don’t they don’t really turn out anywhere near what you expected. Here we are totally preparing with God’s help and direction from his Word. ***“Be self-controlled.”*** Set your hope on God’s Grace – look forward to judgment day.

Because you want to be obedient children – and who of us has not seen and even been disobedient children? – do not conform to the evil desires which are acted out all around us, in the people of the world. But, with God and his holiness as a pattern, be holy – in all you do. In fact, God commands this. Did you notice the specific sins Peter is naming? ***“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”***

As “genuine believers” – you are after all, children of God though faith in Christ Jesus as we learn from Galatians 3:26: ***“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”*** (King James Version) we are told ‘do not return to your former pagan life-style.’

All the goods of this age can become the goals one seeks rather than means to the goal of serving God. After all, it is these desires – evil desires – which control most people.

God has sanctified us by the working of the Holy Ghost. Christians are called – to God and also to separation from the way of life of this age. Be holy in all you do – your entire life-style. Now this does not refer to total sinlessness, but to the idea of “full obedience to God”, like Noah in our Old Testament lesson.

“Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.” God judges impartially. The word fear here is used in the way Luther explained the first commandment: reverential awe of God. Don’t fear your persecutors, but instead fear God.

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”

Because you know you weren’t redeemed with perishable things – gold and silver – yes, they perish, they get lost and stolen, too – you are valuable! Jesus Christ died FOR YOU.

Why do those who profess to be Christians so often live unsanctified lives? Sometimes because people just don’t think. Peter helps us get our thinking straight. Remember who it is that you are praying to – your Father. Remember that he judges each one’s work. God cares about how we think, talk, and live. He cares about what we do with our lives.

God reminds us of ***“the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.”*** Peter could be referring to the legalism and human rules that had become the way of life for the Jews. He could also have been referring to the religious traditions of the Greeks and other pagan people. All the false gods of the pagans, from Zeus to the household gods that may have been part of their daily lives, are empty, vain, useless. They are no real gods, they are fake, artificial, and can do nothing.

As you live your lives, remember what it cost God to make you his own. It was blood, the blood of Jesus which was the perfect sacrifice for sins. Jesus was chosen from eternity to do this, but Peter reminds his first readers that Jesus was recently revealed to them and to all the world in the completeness of the resurrection history.

Through Jesus you believe in God who did this for him, and thus your faith and hope are in God, – not in traditions or anything else. Remember the cost of your redemption. His first readers understood the redemption of slaves. His readers would realize from the gospel proclamation which they had heard that they had been living in bondage, a slavery they had inherited from their ancestors. Their entire way of life: religious beliefs, ethical values and actions – it was empty: worthless, futile, empty of hope and value. They have been purchased and won from all this, as you may remember from Luther’s explanation to the second article of the creed, and their release has been paid for. But the price was much more precious, something with true value.

Peter repeats the scriptural image of the Passover lamb. God paid this price deliberately. It was a plan ***“chosen before the creation of the world”*** but revealed now, in the last days. And God did it all for you! How special! How grand! Your privileged status, along with the sense of the impending end of all things should strengthen believers in all our trials.

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you.”

Do we really purify ourselves? No, but we take it upon our selves. We are purified by God, through the work of the Holy Ghost because the Father imputes Jesus’ perfection upon and to us. We make application of this to our lives. God cleansed us. We then seek to stay as clean as we can. But it is difficult, as you might think of children dressed up after being cleaned up. Some want to play in mud again. Some like to stay clean. Christians want to be like those who want to try to stay clean and obey their parents!

Obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for brothers – especially your confessing Christian brothers and sisters whom you know. Self is no longer the most important person in this world.

Love one another deeply, with love from the heart. The picture is used again that you have been born again ***“Not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”*** Peter then quotes Isaiah to remind us of our frailty, and that we need God every moment of every day. ***“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you.”*** Grass doesn’t endure. But the Word of God endures. And this is the Word – Words of God, not just words of men – that has been proclaimed to you.

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Therefore! The conclusion: Get rid of all wickedness in the heart, all wickedness in your words, and all wickedness in your deeds. Notice the list he gives us: ***“all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”*** All wickedness! Then he lists some attitudes and ideas that no one else can see until they are revealed in other sins. These are sins of the heart and mind. These are sins which then reveal themselves in words – ***“slander of every kind.”***

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Peter wants our spiritual food to be pure. One writer had this to say: “It is ironic that some people spend a great deal of energy – and money – examining the labels of the food they buy, preferring foods that are organically grown, wary of chemicals and additives and yet are careless about the official teachings of the church they join and the denomination to which they belong. God has taken great pains to give his pure word to the world. We must then insist that our churches keep God’s purity in all their teachings!”

We are to grow up. You won’t drink mother’s milk all your life, but will move on to strong meat. You’ve gotten a taste of the goodness of the Lord. Let us join the hymn writer:

“Let us ever walk with Jesus,
Follow His example pure,
Flee the world, which would deceive us
And to sin our souls allure.
Ever in His footsteps treading,
Body here, yet soul above,
Full of faith and hope and love,
Let us do the Father's bidding.
Faithful Lord, abide with me;
Savior, lead, I follow Thee. “Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal, 409:1)