

“What God Hath Cleansed”
Acts 11:5-9, Thanksgiving Day
November 26, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....How nice it was to hear and read God’s Word today in Psalm 65 where we were once again reminded just where all the bounties of our harvest come from!...the good and gracious hand of our Lord! Once again He has indeed crowned yet another year with His goodness so that the sheep of His pasture can again eat, even feast upon His tender mercies which endure forever! Though we have yet filled another year of our lives with sin, He has through His Son bestowed upon us His grace. “The pastures are clothed with flocks, the valleys also are covered over with corn: they shout for joy, they also sing! Let us likewise joyfully sing His praises this glorious day of Thanksgiving!

While we should daily thank God for our temporal and spiritual blessings, especially the free gift of our salvation through Christ, let us today thank Him for the doctrine of Christian liberty. When God neither commands nor forbids a certain thing, we are free to do or not do this thing. We are free to “serve the Lord in gladness.” One example of Christian liberty is this: while God forbids His Christians to be selfish overindulgent gluttons, we are nevertheless free to eat to our hearts content this Thanksgiving Day. It is not a sin to have a feast and thoroughly enjoy it, knowing this feast has come from the Lord. Neither is it a sin to drink alcohol or smoke if we are of age, wear makeup if we are a girl, play poker or games with dice, eat chocolate, eat caviar, drinking coffee, tea, or any number of things. Not everything is a sin. Not everything is forbidden. Thus when it comes to sin and this doctrine of Christian liberty, while there are matters of conscience and its always a sin to break God’s law, it is also a sin to create a law which God has not created. Thus as a rule we Christians must always be moved by God’s grace to avoid these two extremes. The first is lawlessness, sinning at will and taking God’s grace for granted. The second is legalism, making and following laws God has not made. Thus God said to Peter, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”

Our text begins with Peter rehearsing his vision to the Jews of the circumcision in Jerusalem. Peter said, **I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four**

corners; and it came even to me.” Peter wasn’t dreaming, but he was in a trance, his eyes most likely open. God gave Peter a direct revelation through this vision in which a great sheet was lowered from heaven. While God could still give such visions today He has not promised to do so. He has instead revealed to us his written Word in our Bibles and Jesus taught these words are “spirit and life”, profitable for “doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness.” God’s Word alone is our guide. We need not add to the Word dreams, signs, or visions. Watch out then for false prophets who claim to have either. In Deuteronomy 13 God taught the Jews if the signs of the prophets came true, yet the prophet taught something contrary to God’s Word, the Jews were not to follow that prophet but stone him. Similarly in Matthew 24 Jesus warned, “There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” We are not to follow signs, wonders and miracles of healing but God’s Word alone. Beware of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches with miracle workers.

As for a true vision of great importance, Peter saw lowered in this great sheet, **“fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.** Whereas before God had forbidden the Jews to eat pigs, camels, rabbits, certain birds and fishes, now Peter and all Jews were absolutely free to eat them. In like manner Christians today enjoy Christian liberty concerning food. We are free to eat any food under the sun. For “every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.” If you pray before you eat, God will sanctify your food that it be put to a holy use. “For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

But what exactly is Christian liberty? It is our freedom by faith to do or not to do those things God has not specifically commanded. The German word here is *Mitteldinge*, middle things, and the Greek word is *Adiaphora*, indifferent things. “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.” Col. 2 By faith each believer belongs to the Body of Christ, hence there is no set of laws which will justify us in God’s sight. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that

believeth.“ This means we who are justified by faith do not obey His laws because of God’s wrath, but having been set free from sin and its curse we happily obey God by faith. Thus dear Christian, do not become legalistic with God’s law, nor let anyone bind your conscience by man-made laws, “Let no man judge you”. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

When God told Peter, **Arise Peter, slay and eat**, God was teaching Peter Christian liberty. It is not a sin Peter, to eat any of these animals! Yet Peter said, **Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.** With these words Peter momentarily fell into legalism in that the commandment he wanted to follow contradicted God’s clear commandment - Arise, slay and eat! While it is true God had before forbidden all Jews to eat certain unclean meats, these ceremonial laws were abolished by Christ in the New Testament period. Due to man’s sin these laws were no longer benefiting the Gospel, but a hindrance to it. As a rule the Jews had misused these laws to create their own righteousness as opposed to the Gentiles, so God took away those laws to remind them they were unrighteous, the same as the Gentiles. In this way God leveled the playing field so the Jews would know they were just as dead in their sins as the Gentiles, so Jews and Gentiles alike would see Christ alone is the only way to be saved. “Neither is there salvation in any other.”

This is important for us today because we by nature are all legalists who want to be saved by the law and not the Gospel. The old man within constantly seeks to justify himself by what he does or does not do. This is also why this world is filled with thousands of different religions with thousands of different man-made laws that through obedience of laws such might feel they are righteous. Christians alone know Christ alone has redeemed them from all sin. God’s Word makes it perfectly clear, “If by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.” Thus regarding God’s law we must always be careful not to fall into Satan’s trap, whereby we go above and beyond God’s commandment, inventing our own. Is it a sin to get drunk? Yes absolutely! But it is not a sin to drink alcohol for Jesus gave wine to His own disciples and said, “Take drink, this is My blood.” It is a sin to be a glutton? Yes absolutely! But it is not a sin to enjoy a feast, for God commanded Pharaoh, “Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.” Let us likewise enjoy our

Thanksgiving Feast today loving Him who first loved us.

As for Christian liberty, lawlessness, and legalism, how do we walk that straight and narrow path? **FIRST** we begin with Christ, knowing that a man is not justified by the deeds of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. **SECOND** from His love for us proceeds our love for Him. We do not become lawless, taking His grace for granted, but we “delight in the law of God after the inward man” and “love is the fulfilling of the law.” **THIRD** we guard against our self-righteous flesh, by having a true and proper spiritual sense of God’s law, not an external superficial understanding. We have Christian liberty on those middle and indifferent things, but we do not use our liberty as a cloak of malice. We use our freedom wisely and not carelessly. If we have a weak Christian whose conscience tells him something is sin when it is not, for the sake of the Gospel we don’t encourage him to do what his conscience forbids. On the other hand if a proud Christian says something is a sin when it is not and he tells others they are sinning though they do only that which is free, for the sake of the Gospel “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Do what he says is forbidden, that others may see we are free.

What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. What a joy it is to see and understand this Christian liberty God has given us by faith! Therefore dear Christian, arise and eat that which has already been slain! Heartily enjoy this Thanksgiving meal God has given you, only do so to the glory of God! Serve the Lord in gladness. But before you serve Him, remember that He, the Paschal Lamb was slain that you might be set free, and He rose again in triumph on the third day! Yea “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.” Through Him God in no wise calls us common, but cleansed, redeemed, elect, and chosen. Amen.