

Admonition and Encouragement
Hebrews 13:1-21, Trinity Sunday XXII
November 4, 2007

Beloved of the Lord.....Every parent knows children need both admonition and encouragement. At times a parent must correct and admonish a child.....and at other times the parent must encourage their child and remind them that things are not so bad. Of course, our blessed Lord knows this far greater than any of us, and in His holy Scriptures we find both word of admonition and also encouragement. In our lesson today, God at first admonishes us saying, "Let brotherly love continue", and "be content" with what we have. But God also encourages us with words like, "I will not leave thee", and "the Lord is my helper." May God therefore help us today to receive both His words of admonition and also encouragement. For we not only need the knowledge of God's will, but also the strength to do it.

I. General admonitions. So we begin today first with words of admonition. Our Lord says, "Let brotherly love continue." We need this reminder for it is not in our nature to continually love even our fellow Christians. Christians often fail to love their spiritual brothers. When we do not love as we should, there is strife, contention, and arguments, all of which offend our Almighty God. The devil himself rejoices when he sees God's children divided by differences of opinion, judgment, or hard feelings. And while we are to uphold and contend for true doctrine, even this is to be done in a brotherly and peaceful manner with all patience and longsuffering. This is possible only if we remember the undying love of God for us through Christ. By way of God's love, we love one another fervently, with a pure heart, exercising all patience. Romans 15:1 says, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." In other words, the stronger Christian puts up and endures the sins of selfishness in the weak. For it is the weak Christian in the congregation, that always wants things to be done their way. While the stronger Christian seeks not to please himself, but only others. "Let brotherly love continue."

God also desires we be hospitable to one another, and also strangers. Abraham himself once had three men who visited him, and two were angels and one was the Son of God. With true oriental hospitality, Abraham slew the fatted calf and treated his guests with love. In like manner Christians should always be hospitable to their guests. We should also visit those who are sick, or those Christians in prison who suffer. We should pray for persecuted Christians around the world. Jesus taught that when we visit the sick, clothe the naked, or feed the hungry, we are really doing good to Jesus Himself. "For

I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." The Good Samaritan was serving Christ, when he had compassion upon his suffering neighbor.

The next subject our Lord covers is marriage and faithfulness. "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled." Sex within marriage is wholesome and good, a gift from God. There is nothing wrong with it, unless it becomes perverse. Moreover God uses the union of man and woman to create children, who are the heritage of the Lord. A large family is a great blessing from God which brings much happiness. And what a shame it is when the married or unmarried practice birth control, as if children were a curse and burden. "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Those who despise marriage and pollute and dishonor their own bodies by sex outside of marriage, such will be damned, except they repent. We should pray for our Christian youth daily, that they keep their bodies pure for their future spouse.

After marriage, the Lord rebukes greed. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have." Covetousness is greed. "Greed is a disease of the mind, the heart, and the soul that reaches out to possess everything, and it is never satisfied" (Miller). Just think of gambling and the lottery. Poor people gamble because they want to be rich. Rich people gamble because they still want more. The sin of the rich and poor is equal. It is greed. But even if we don't gamble, and in life have very little, if we are not content with what little we have, that alone is proof of our greed. Quite contrary to this Jesus teaches we are to be content with the things we have, even if it is very little. Psalm 37:16 says, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." The righteous but poor man is happy because he is rich in God's grace. He knows that though times may be financially tight, the Lord will provide as He has always provided before. The righteous man remembers the Lord has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." When the believer closes his eyes and thinks only of Christ, all that he does not have disappears, and all that he has in Christ suddenly appears: the gift of faith, the Gospel Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, life everlasting, paradise. And so truly we are not poor at all, but we possess the riches of God's kingdom. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." We may be a financially poor and small congregation, but truly we are rich in Christ and His Word.

His Word, God's Word, comes to us primarily through the Office of the Ministry. For this reason God

reminds us, "Remember them which have the rule over you" and likewise, "obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." This passage is a two-edged sword. Though it is an admonition for the members of a congregation, it also strikes the pastor. For God holds ministers accountable for all souls in a congregation. If he fails to comfort the penitent with God's grace, if he fails to warn the wicked that they will die in their sins except they repent, then that pastor himself will lose his own salvation, and perish eternally in damnation! Woe to the pastor who fails to preach and teach God's Word as the oracle of God! And truly what pastor cannot but cry out in grief saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" That is why ministers need the prayers of the people. "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly."

Nevertheless, God would by the words "Obey them that have the rule over you", teach members of a congregation that they are to heed, listen to, and obey their pastor, when the pastor seeks to correct them with the Word of God. And while a pastor certainly is not of a more holy order than the layman (God forbid!), it is still the Holy Ghost who has matched that pastor up with the congregation, and the Holy Ghost then uses that pastor to teach doctrine to the congregation. Therefore when a pastor out of brotherly love seeks to correct an erring member in private, and shows from Scripture why this or that is a sin, it is truly Christ who is seeking to correct the sinner, through the pastor. The pastor speaks for Christ. Jesus said, "He that hears you hears me, and he that despises you despises me." When pastors admonish, if the member listens, this brings joy to the pastor's heart. But if they do not listen, it brings the pastor grief. It grieves the pastor because he knows that soul will perish except they repent. And so the Lord commands us to obey our ministers who bring us God's Word, "that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you."

II. Encouragement to do His will. But now, after these words of admonition, God also gives us encouragement and hope. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight." We see that our own works cannot make us perfect. For if we were already perfect, why would God have to admonish us with all these words about brotherly love, greed, and marriage? Therefore with great mercy, the God of peace encourages us, by reminding us of that Great Shepherd of the Sheep, Christ the Lord! Jesus suffered outside the city walls of Jerusalem, "that He

might sanctify (or make holy) the people with His own blood." Here is all the strength and encouragement you need, dear friend! In Christ Jesus there is perfect healing, a perfect balm which heals all wounds of sin. He heals our failure to love, our greed and covetous nature, and our sins against the sixth commandment!

Therefore let us rejoice in that God encourages us and strengthens us to do God's will by forgiving our sins. God lifts up those that are cast down by His grace and forgiveness. If you are discouraged by your sins, come to Holy Communion and God will heal you with His own body and blood. This will give you strength to lead a holier life. For Christ will never leave you. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" God says. Jesus never forsakes nor leaves His disciples but instead promises them, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the earth." Because Christ is our Mediator, we can boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." We gladly bear the reproach of Christ that His name be honored even if our enemies threaten us with death! Whom shall we fear? Even death has lost its sting! Through Christ we possess all things, inherit all things, and can do all things! If God be for us, who can be against us?

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever!" His undying love for us cannot change, nor will it change. Nor will He ever forget us! "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" saith the Lord (Is. 49:15). "His compassions fail not. *They are* new every morning: great *is* thy faithfulness. The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." Lam. 3 Every morning when we roll our weary bodies out of bed, God's compassions and mercies are there with us. When we drive, or ride our bike to work, Christ is there with us, guarding and protecting us, though we see Him not. His compassions do not, can not, nor will not fail us! We put all hope, trust, and confidence in Him. For He is the perfect strength and healing of our soul. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly." Jn. 10:10 By faith in Christ, truly we have life more abundantly, for Christ is the strength and life of our soul. The Holy Ghost Himself lives in our hearts by faith, and His own Spirit within will encourage us, giving us strength to do His will. He will establish our hearts with grace. Therefore, may the God of peace make you perfect, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.