

Ministers, and Their Commands

II Thessalonians 3:1-13, Trinity Sunday IX

August 5, 2007

Beloved of the Lord....There are many passages in the Bible, concerning the relationship between a minister of a congregation, and the people or members of a congregation. God in His wisdom encourages both the minister and the members in their appropriate role, to fulfill their duties toward one another. For example, God reminds ministers that they are not to be lords or tyrants over their congregations. Pastors are not to be dictators! God tells His pastors in I Peter 5 they are not to be "lords over *God's* heritage, but [examples] to the flock." Their whole life and ministry ought to be one of selfless sacrifice whereby the Gospel is preached, the Sacraments administered, and souls saved to the glory of God. In like manner, the members of a congregation have their duties and responsibilities toward their pastor as well. While naturally they are to hear and support the preaching and teaching of God's Word from their pastor, they are also to obey their pastor who faithfully speaks God's Word to them. Hebrews 13:17 teaches all believers in a congregation, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." There is also proof of this same doctrine in our text today. In verse four Paul says, "We have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you."

But whenever we speak of how the believers in a congregation are to obey their pastors, God gives an absolute and concrete limitation to such obedience. This condition or limitation is the Word of God. And so it follows that if a ministers is commanding something that the Word of God does not command, believers ought not, indeed must not obey that pastor. For to obey a minister who has commanded something over and above the Word of God, is to disobey God, and "we ought to obey God rather than man." Hence, there is a right understanding of the obedience that hearers owe their pastor, and a wrong understanding. May God help us to see that we must obey our pastors whenever they proclaim God's Word to us, and we must disobey them when they have gone further than God's Word.

I. It is the duty of Christians to obey their ministers when they proclaim the Word of God. Paul begins, "Finally, brethren, pray for us." Paul requests the prayers of the believers. Just as Paul often remember them in his prayers, so he asks they would remember him. Believers in a congregation are to pray for their pastors, that God would lead their pastor and give them the heart and mind of Christ. We pray that God would help our pastor be faithful to God's Word alone, rightly dividing the Word of truth. We especially pray that he be filled with the

Holy Spirit, that he may preach the bull beauty of the Gospel, which is the beauty of our beautiful Savior Jesus Christ. We pray that our pastor preach the Gospel so purely, that all the troubled souls in a congregation find the peace and joy of Christ Jesus, for there is complete remission of sin through His name. We also pray that the Gospel which is preached by our pastor have "free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people." For our blessed Savior wants you dear sinner to find perpetual comfort in His free gift of salvation. For Christ Jesus has by way of the cross, reconciled God's heart with sinful man. All that remains is that we be reconciled to God by faith in Christ Jesus.

After all this, Paul now encourages the Christians who often find discouragement in life. "But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil." Do not forget dear child of God, the good Lord above is watching over you. He has not forgotten you.....and He knows the troubles of your life. Yet He remains faithful, He cannot deny Himself! He will stablish you, meaning He will settle and calm your troubled breast, much as a mother stills her child. It is the Gospel Word and His Sacrament which comfort us even today. For though there is evil all around us, God's Holy Spirit by the Word will keep and preserve us in the one true faith. Believers need not have doubts concerning their salvation, for the blood of Jesus Christ carries more weight than our sins. Moreover, when we have faith in the power of the redeeming blood of Christ, God Himself, the Holy Ghost lives within us by faith. And so even if we pass through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for God is with us! God protects us from evil and keeps the devil at bay, so we do not fall into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice. I Peter 5:10 says, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*." Of course we will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, Jesus says, "I have overcome the world." Be not fearful nor afraid, only believe.

Faith is all that God requires from us. And where there is faith, there will also be good works. Paul now says, "We have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." Several points much be made here. First, all glory belongs to God, for the good works done by believers. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. 2:13 Without Christ we can do nothing, and with Him we can do all things! It is really God then, who does good works through us. And such good works can only be done by faith. The love of God works in man's heart so that man out of love for God, does all God commands! Faith works by love, and without love, faith will not work.

Another thing we notice in Paul's verse is that he commands the Thessalonians to do what he says. This brings us to the theme of today's sermon: Ministers and Their Commands. Is it right for a minister to command us to do anything? And here we must answer yes, provided his commands are the same and in agreement with God's commands. Consider the way Paul commands the Thessalonians in verse six. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly..." The Thessalonians here ought to obey the command of Paul because it is God's command, the divine will of the Lord Jesus Christ. For there were certain members in the Thessalonian congregation who were refusing to work for their bread. They were disobeying God's Word which says, "If any would not work, neither should he eat." "God wants no idleness, He commands every man to eat his bread in the sweat of his face. A man that is persistently idle, that refuses to work, should therefore also be excluded from the legitimate fruit of labor, the food necessary to sustain the body" (Kretzmann). We see from our text also that when people do not work as they should, they become busybodies, interfering in the lives and private affairs of others. Paul says, "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." Truly, idle hands are the devil's workshop.

And so when we hear these words and commands of Paul, though such words come from the lips of man, God is behind the words. Jesus said, "He that heareth you heareth me." And so ministers do speak for God and obedience is required, when the minister speaks God's Word. One of our confessions, the *Brief Statement of 1932*, article 32 says, "Although the office of the ministry is a divine ordinance, it possesses no other power than the power of the Word of God, I Pet. 4:11; that is to say, it is the duty of Christians to yield unconditional obedience to the office of the ministry whenever, and as long as, the minister proclaims to them the Word of God." As Christians we have no problem giving unconditional obedience to our ministers who speak for God, when they faithfully bring God's Word to us.

II. It is the duty of Christians to disobey their ministers, when ministers go beyond the Word of God. However, and sad to say, there are times when a minister does not faithfully minister. Sometimes ministers fall into error and they preach above and beyond God's sacred Word. When this happens, that is, when a pastor makes a new commandment which God has not commanded, Christians are not to obey. The second half of article 32 of the Brief Statement says, "If, however, the minister, in his teachings and injunctions, were to go beyond the Word of God, it would be the duty of Christians not to obey, but to disobey him, so as to remain faithful to

Christ, Mt. 23:8. Accordingly, we reject the false doctrine ascribing to the office of the ministry the right to demand obedience and submission in matters which Christ has not commanded." For example, if a minister teaches that there is a lack of modesty in a congregation, and from now on all women must wear dresses, and such dresses must reach down to the ankles, such a minister has commanded more than God has commanded. While God does command modesty of both men and women, He does not give a list of rules and regulations. The faith that God has created in the Christian heart will move them to dress modestly, for faith works by love. And love is the fulfilling of the law. And so if a minister goes further than God's Word and makes new commandments on matters of which God has not commanded, that minister falls into error, and we are duty bound to disobey.

What both congregation and minister alike must remember is that God's Word reigns supreme in the Church, and there is no higher authority above God's Word. There is no pope in the Christian Church. It is our Lord Jesus Christ who is the head of His Church, and all who believe and trust in His salvation make up His own body. For "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Indeed we are holy and without blemish, by the merits of our Savior who clothes us with His own righteousness. We are His body, and as members of His body we will serve Him in meekness and humility. Paul writes, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Rom 12 These words apply to pastor and layman alike.

Beloved of the Lord, we are the members one of another. We are members of the body of Christ. It is He who sanctifies and cleanses us by the power of His Word. Therefore may His Word ever and always reign supreme in our church. For Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Jn. 6:63 God's Spirit lives and works in His Word. And it is by His Word that we enter into everlasting life above. Amen.